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ELLIOTT MONOGRAPHS

IN THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Edited by

EDWARD C. ARMSTRONG

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

AND

HIS FIGURES OF SPEECH

BY

J. M. BURTON



PRINCETON, N. J.

PARIS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

LIBRAIRIE ÉDOUARD CHAMPION

1921

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MACON, PROTAT FRÈRES, IMPRIMEURS.

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*Prepared as a doctoral dissertation and completed in 1916, this monograph was laid aside in response to the more pressing call of the hour. Its author now rests in the soil of France, with an unbroken record of tranquil steadfastness as student, as teacher, and as soldier. He died in the service of his country at Vittel (Vosges), October 5, 1918.*

*In accord with the wish which he had expressed, the study is hereby dedicated to his mother.*





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## CHAPTER I

### OUTLINE AND STATISTICAL SUMMARY

The aim of this monograph is the study of a group of Honoré de Balzac's figures of speech, in order to fix as definitely as possible their relation to the man, to show how they derive from him and how they throw light on his complex nature, and to estimate their literary value. An investigation of the possible sources of Balzac's figures is not included: such an investigation, while it would have been desirable, is not indispensable to the purpose in view, for which interest is centered, not on the artistic manipulation of the individual figurative conceptions, but on the general lines of the author's choice of the comparisons and on the purposes for which he most frequently uses them.

The figures of speech form an interesting element of any style in which they are employed. Thus there have been numerous studies of their use by ancient and modern authors, but the treatises are frequently little more than catalogues of the figures, arranged according to the fields from which the comparisons are drawn. Such presentations aid us to judge the range of the author's knowledge and interest, the exactness of his observation, the power of his imagination, and his esthetic sense. But, apart from this, the figures of speech, presenting infinite possibilities of arbitrary variation, can be made to throw numerous side-lights on the most intimate phases of an author's personality, and from them we should be able to derive some generalized principles of figurative creation.

If it be true in a certain sense that the style is the man,  
VIII.

the same should be said even more positively of the figures of speech, an element of style in which the author is comparatively free from the restraint of convention and into which the rhythm of his thought is translated freely and often unconsciously. Bourget, in his essay on Stendhal, says: "La première question à se poser sur un auteur est celle-ci: quelles images ressuscitent dans la chambre noire de son cerveau, lorsqu'il ferme les yeux? C'est l'élément premier de son talent. C'est son esprit même. Le reste n'est que de la mise en œuvre<sup>1</sup>."

Bourget is not specifically referring to figures of speech, but affirms that the kind of images — physical, intellectual, or emotional — that arise give an accurate index to the character of the mind; a statement which we can accept if we do not attempt too rigid an application. But the way in which these images are associated with one another, the way in which they are paired off, should be still more instructive. We should be able to see what takes place in the author's mind when he wishes to describe a shabby parlor, a miser, a pure woman, or love in a young girl's breast. If there is no association of ideas, we have a literal description or account, but if there is, that association, reflected in the simile or metaphor, represents a definite psychological phenomenon.

With this principle in mind we wish to study the similes and metaphors of Balzac, for whom some such method is natural and even necessary, for his figures have no particular interest in themselves. Victor Hugo is an artist in imagery: we can take pleasure in reading selections from a catalogue of his figures without knowing the context, in the same way that we enjoy a snatch of song from an opera. Balzac's art is not refined to the point of being impersonal, of having a separate, self-sufficing existence; it is indissolubly bound up with the man and his subject. He was guided by a happy instinct when he tried to fuse his work into a single whole, for there are few other cases where the author and his work

1. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, I, p. 291.

form such a composite unit, and probably none where a single work loses more of its distinctive character by being isolated. Similarly for the figures of speech, their main interest comes from their relation to the author. In studying the character of the figures, the manner and purpose of their use, we gain an insight into certain phases of the intellect and personality of the man, a process which is readily merged with the reverse : that of indicating how certain ideas, characteristics, infirmities perhaps, of the man are reflected in his figures and hence in his style. This will lead to some more general discussion of certain qualities of style in their relation to the author and in their effect on the reader.

When we recall that we are dealing with the author of the *Comédie humaine*, a limitation of the field is manifestly imposed, and I have selected the *Scènes de la Vie de province*, which include eleven novels, good, bad, and indifferent. They are almost coextensive with the period of Balzac's literary activity, and, what is much more important with an author who shows so little chronological development, they present striking examples of the most important phases of his genius. But for our present purposes we must have a more detailed examination of the figures than it is practicable to give to the whole of even this section ; and so attention has been chiefly directed to three novels. The *Lys dans la vallée* gives us an excellent example of the poetic and romantic phase of Balzac and contains such a mass of figures that it is worthy of a separate treatment. *Un ménage de garçon* presents one of his famous monsters of iniquity and is an excellent illustration of the author's materialism, which descends frequently to vulgarity and triviality. Both of these are forceful books and reveal Balzac as a conscious and careful workman. The third novel, *Eugénie Grandet*, is a masterpiece in which the two phases of his work are fused, and for us is all the more interesting because it is here that he has shown the most self-restraint, that he has chastened his genius, and thus we may suppose that what we find in it represents a serious



purpose and is not the result of his having given rein to the fancies of the moment. The conclusions drawn from these three novels will be tested by examples from other novels, more especially from the *Scènes de la Vie de province*.

It has further been necessary to limit the kind of figures studied. As has already been indicated, the term "figure" is used in its most current acceptation, that is as including similes and metaphors, or in other words any expressed or implied comparison between objects or acts which belong to different categories or exist under different circumstances. If an inanimate object or a lower order of life is compared to man, we have a special form : personification. The other rhetorical figures such as apostrophe, interrogation, and even metonymy and synecdoche, are mere modes of expression or linguistic conveniences. Hyperbole and antithesis do express a certain attitude of mind, and we find them frequently employed by Balzac, but the principle back of the creation of the individual figures of either type is always the same, and nothing could be gained by a detailed study : the difference between two hyperboles for instance is merely one of degree.

But figurative expression has become such a vital part of the language that there are many comparisons, usually in the form of metaphors, which have ceased to be felt as such and have become the normal expression of the idea. They are translated directly into abstract concepts without evoking any image of the thing originally suggested as an analogical explanation of the object under discussion. *Jeter un regard, une douleur profonde, l'empreinte de mélancholie sur sa figure, épouser les intérêts de quelqu'un* evoke no image of the literal meanings, and the study of such dead figures belongs to the domain of semantics. It is sufficient to state here that Balzac, exceedingly given to all types of figurative expression, has frequent recourse to these banal figures. He shows an especial fondness for certain terms, such as *jeter, profond, froid*, and terms connected with the ideas suggested by *combat, lien* or *drame*.

It is often difficult to decide whether a given expression represents a personal imprint of the mind of the author or whether he has simply taken it already coined from the wealth of contemporary figurative language. In attempting to determine the extent of the personal element, I have made extensive use of French dictionaries, but have relied especially on the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, which lies within the dates of the works studied and which gives a considerable number of figurative uses of words. We can at least be sure that an expression from the pen of Balzac, when recognized by this most conservative work, does not indicate any original creation on his part. Other elements must also be taken into account in our decisions. At the base of the figure of speech there is the idea of a comparison between two objects. The comparison may be new or rare, but this is not necessary in order that the figure have a stylistic and psychological significance. The most banal comparison may be revived and made real by a new form of expression. Further — and this is more important for Balzac — a banal figure becomes significant when it is prolonged by carrying out the comparison in detail, or when it is used over and over again. Briefly then, we wish to study those expressions of Balzac in which words are used in other than their usual relations, and in which, either on account of infrequency of the basal idea, or of insistence upon it by a new mode of expression, by prolongation, by frequent repetition, there is evidence that the concept of the thing under discussion does not stand alone in the mind of the author, but that it is associated with something else which he sees and which he wishes us to see on account of certain suggestive similarities. In the elimination of banal figures, the tests may be less rigidly applied to similes than to metaphors, since the naming and the expressed comparison of two objects indicate that both objects were in the mind of the author.

In order to formulate any general conclusions, it has been necessary to make a very careful classification of the figures,

the results of which are shown in the table that follows. The customary method of classifying figures of speech solely by the second term or source of the comparison is inadequate for our purposes, for we fail to grasp the stylistic and psycholog-

STATISTICAL TABLE		Lys dans la vallée	Eugénie Grandet	Un ménage de garçon	Total		
COMPARISONS							
of		to					
(I) man	{	(A) man.....	124	33	36	193	
		(B) animals.....	46	26	35	107	
		(C) plants.....	33	6	9	48	
		(D) things.....	39	22	20	81	
(II)	{	(a) human look	(A) material phenom-	28	11	6	45
		(b) human voice	ena	42	8	10	60
(III) spiritual phenom- ena	{	(A) plants.....	34	1	3	40	
		(B) fluids.....	53	2	14	69	
		(C) flame.....	42	6	10	58	
		(D) physiological phe- nomena.....	81	4	24	109	
		(E) music.....	9	0	2	11	
		(F) material phenom- ena in general...	103	7	35	145	
IV) abstract relations and conditions of man	{	(A) physical relations and conditions..	79	41	17	137	
(V) acts	{	(A) acts of similar nature.....	19	13	33	65	
(VI) inanimate objects		(A) inanimate objects	41	17	20	78	
		(B) living beings.....	31	14	9	54	
TOTAL.....			804	211	285	1300	

ical import of a comparison unless we take into consideration both terms and compare their real relation with that indicated by the figure of speech. I have adopted a grouping which seemed, after a study of the figures in these three novels, to facilitate best a comprehensive idea of the whole mass of

figures, of their individual character, and of the purpose for which they are used. All the figures will be grouped under six general headings corresponding to what Balzac wishes to describe; opposite each heading are classified as minutely as seemed profitable the second terms of the comparisons.

In the statistical summary given on page 6, I have included only those figures used by Balzac or by his spokesman Félix de Vandenesse; in this way I eliminate a disturbing element resulting from Balzac's attempt to characterize his men and women by their modes of expression. The figures used in dialogue will come up for their share of discussion later on in this study.

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## CHAPTER II

### TOPICAL ANALYSIS OF BALZAC'S FIGURES OF SPEECH

In this chapter the comparisons are grouped according to the nature of their first term, and the chapter will serve largely as an interpretation of the statistical table given at the close of Chapter I.

#### GROUP I. — FIRST TERM : **Man**

In this group the figures, as expressed, treat of man as a physical organism, but the intellectual and spiritual sides are naturally present in the mind of the author and in many cases really form the basis of the comparison.

*Group I, A.* — Comparisons between human beings are very frequent in Balzac ; he describes the acts or the emotions of a character by comparing them to the acts or emotions of a person of different social status or under different circumstances. In many cases, of course, the similarity is so great that the comparison could hardly be called a figure of speech, and even those that I have listed, which are usually expressed in the form of similes, might be called with greater exactness analogies, in order to distinguish them from those figures in which there is more real imagery. In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find twenty-seven figures based on differences of age, sex, and physiological condition, among which the most interesting are the seventeen comparisons to children : “ Cet homme était devenu inquiet, comme l'enfant qui ne voit plus remuer le pauvre insecte qu'il tourmente ” (p. 576) ; “ La comtesse se leva par un mouvement d'impatience, comme un enfant qui veut un jouet ” (p. 627) ; “ Avec ce courage d'enfant qui ne doute de rien ” (p. 410) ; “ Aussitôt, comme un enfant qui, descendu dans un abîme en jouant, en cueillant des fleurs, voit



avec angoisse qu'il lui sera impossible de remonter, n'aperçoit plus le sol humain qu'à une distance infranchissable, se sent tout seul, à la nuit, et entend les hurlements sauvages, je compris que nous étions séparés par tout un monde " (p. 301). Forty-nine figures are based on social, political, economic, and racial distinctions, the soldier, the sovereign, and the slave offering the most frequent sources of comparison: " Comme l'enfant arraché par Napoléon aux tendres soins du logis, elle eût habitué ses pieds à marcher dans la boue et dans la neige, accoutumé son front aux boulets, toute sa personne à la passive obéissance du soldat " (p. 454); " Arabelle voulut montrer son pouvoir comme un sultan qui, pour prouver son adresse, s'amuse à décoller des innocents " (p. 602); " Un contentement semblable à celui de l'esclave qui trompe son maître " (p. 481).

A very interesting feature of this novel lies in the thirty-seven figures in which religious terms are used with reference to carnal man, especially to express love between the two sexes and its effects. Madame de Mortsauf is a saint, a martyr, a nun: " La sainte qui souffrait son lent martyre à Cloche-gourde " (p. 566); " Sereine sur son bûcher de sainte et de martyre " (p. 461); " Attendant toujours une douleur nouvelle, comme les martyrs attendaient un nouveau coup " (p. 395). There are also specific Biblical references, as: " Couchée comme si elle avait été foudroyée par la voix qui terrassa saint Paul " (p. 585). But much more frequent and striking are the specific comparisons of the sensuous—if not the sensual—to the religious emotions; after catching the tears of Madame de Mortsauf in his hand and drinking them, Félix says to her: " Voici la première, la sainte communion de l'amour. Oui, je viens de participer à vos douleurs, de m'unir à votre âme, comme nous nous unissons au Christ en buvant sa divine substance " (p. 459); or: " Elle qui avait tout laissé pour moi, comme on laisse tout pour Dieu " (p. 574); or: " Elle recevait nos adorations comme un prêtre reçoit l'encens à la messe " (p. 405). In addition to the references to the Bible mentioned

above, there are eleven allusions that may be classed as figures under this heading. They are drawn from Classic, from Italian, and from French sources, with one reference to Don Quixote, and they offer no special interest, with the exception perhaps of the two comparisons of Félix and Madame de Mor-sauf to Petrarch and Laura (pp. 469, 507).

In the other two novels the figures group themselves similarly except that there are almost no references to religion. In *Un ménage de garçon* there are four comparisons to children, and, more striking still, eight to the sick, dying, and dead: "Maigre comme l'est une étique deux heures avant sa mort" (p. 333); "Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours" (p. 333). Fourteen have reference to the professions, with that of the soldier predominating: "Ce sang-froid de général en chef qui permet de conserver l'œil clair et l'intelligence nette au milieu du tourbillon des choses" (p. 130); "M. Hochon...passa l'assiette à travers la table au jeune peintre avec le silence et le sang-froid d'un vieux soldat qui se dit au commencement d'une bataille: "Aujourd'hui, je puis être tué" (p. 223); "Le père Rouget... vint dans la rue prendre Flore par la main, comme un avare eût fait pour son trésor" (p. 296). There are five allusions of no special interest, with the exception of two referring to recent French history and having a pretentious tone: "Flore tomba sous la domination de cet homme, comme la France était tombée sous celle de Napoléon" (p. 317); "En présence de cette agonie, le neveu restait impassible et froid comme les diplomates, en 1814, pendant les convulsions de la France impériale" (p. 317).

In *Eugénie Grandet* there are six comparisons to children: "J'écou...coute, répondit humblement le bonhomme en prenant la malicieuse contenance d'un enfant qui rit intérieurement de son professeur, tout en paraissant lui prêter la plus grande attention" (p. 303); "Les yeux attachés sur les louis, comme un enfant qui, au moment où il commence à voir, contemple stupidement le même objet; et, comme à un enfant,

il lui échappait un sourire pénible " (p. 368) ; " A la vue de ses richesses, elle se mit à applaudir en battant des mains, comme un enfant forcé de perdre son trop-plein de joie dans les naïfs mouvements du corps " (p. 321). Eleven figures refer to professions, as the comparisons of the astute Grandet to an astronomer (p. 224) and to an alchemist (p. 262). More interesting here are those that refer to particular situations, and which have usually a pretentious character : " L'attente d'une mort ignominieuse et publique est moins horrible peut-être pour un condamné que ne l'était pour madame Grandet et pour sa fille l'attente des événements qui devaient terminer ce déjeuner de famille " (p. 343) ; " Certes, la Parisienne qui, pour faciliter la fuite de son amant, soutient de ses faibles bras une échelle de soie, ne montre pas plus de courage que n'en déployait Eugénie en remettant le sucre sur la table " (p. 283) ; " Mais, à la vérité, la vie des célèbres sœurs hongroises, attachées l'une à l'autre par une erreur de la nature, n'avait pas été plus intime que ne l'était celle d'Eugénie et de sa mère " (p. 277). In addition to the last-quoted figure there are eleven allusions, most of them of a rather pretentious nature. Eugénie is compared to the Venus of Milo, to the Jupiter of Phidias, and three times to the Virgin Mary. Similarly the Cruchots and the Des Grassins are the Medici and the Pazzi of Saumur.

In the comparisons between human beings, then, we find, as we should expect, that the professions play a considerable part. But considering the very small place that the child holds in the *Comédie humaine*, we are a little surprised to note the insistence on child life ; the figures indicate that Balzac had observed rather closely the good and bad sides of child nature ; and, in addition to the extended figures, there is a still larger number of cases in which *enfantin* or *d'enfant* is used with a psychological connotation. It is interesting to note here that Balzac in his correspondence is continually speaking of his own nature as being that of a child<sup>1</sup>.

1. Cf. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, I, pp. 489, 343, 337, etc.

*Group I, B.* — In view of Balzac's frequent statement of the correspondence between the human and animal species, we naturally look with interest to see how this idea finds expression in the figures of speech. We find that, though Balzac is fond of animalistic comparisons, he does not let his theory distort his sense of reality. A single animal could not represent a single man, unless its character were greatly enlarged or that of the man simplified ; much less could an animal represent a class or profession in human society. Thus, while one type of animalistic comparisons usually dominates for a character, others are regularly used to represent his various physical or other traits.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* the most striking trait is the frequent comparisons to birds ; thirteen, nine having reference to Madame de Mortsauf. These comparisons concern her movements : " Une femme...se posa près de moi par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid " (p. 408) ; more frequently it is her voice : " La voix de l'ange qui, par intervalles, s'élevait comme un chant de rossignol au moment où la pluie va cesser " (p. 449) ; or the comparison may be less external, more intellectual<sup>1</sup> : " Madame de Mortsauf était le bengali transporté dans la froide Europe, tristement posé sur son bâton, muet et mourant dans sa cage où le garde un naturaliste " (p. 556). The other comparisons are rather well distributed over the animal kingdom ; the lion, tiger, wolf, monkey, dog, horse, serpent and insect are each represented by two or more figures, and most of them are applied to several of the characters. Madame de Mortsauf has " cette expression de lionne au désespoir " (p. 549), while of Lady Dudley it is said that " semblable à la lionne qui a saisi dans sa gueule et rapporté dans son antre une proie à ronger, elle veillait à ce que rien ne troublât son bonheur, et ne gardait comme une conquête insoumise " (p. 570). The most interesting, and the most

1. I use term " intellectual figure " of figures based on an intellectually conceived comparison as contrasted with figures based on purely external and physical similarities. The term is less liable to cause confusion than " logical. "

suggestive of character, are those referring to M. de Mortsaul, whom Balzac himself came to consider the most striking character of the book <sup>1</sup>: "Je fus une pâture à ce lion sans ongles et sans crinière" (p. 443); "Ses yeux étincelèrent comme ceux des tigres" (p. 443); "Son visage ressemblait vaguement à celui d'un loup blanc qui a du sang au museau" (p. 426; cf. 496); "Ces sortes d'esprits se heurtent volontiers aux endroits où brille la lumière, ils y retournent toujours en bourdonnant sans rien pénétrer, et fatiguent l'âme comme les grosses mouches fatiguent l'oreille en fredonnant le long des vitres" (p. 539); "Le comte avait été, comme les mouches par un jour de grande chaleur, plus piquant, plus acerbe, plus changeant qu'à l'ordinaire" (p. 475).

The animalistic comparisons in *Un ménage de garçon* are well scattered over the animal kingdom, but they have almost always a decidedly pejorative value. The birds are usually birds of prey, but such comparisons are no more uncomplimentary than: "Elle était grasse comme une grive après la vendange" (p. 69); or: "Cet amour maternel... tout aussi nécessaire aux commencements de l'artiste que les soins de la poule à ses petits jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient des plumes" (p. 124). The effect produced seems to be that desired by Balzac. Rouget appears as a butterfly, and twice each as a horse, sheep, and dog, and the impression on us each time is about the same: "Semblable au papillon qui s'est pris les pattes dans la cire fondante d'une bougie, Rouget dissipa rapidement ses dernières forces" (p. 317); in the comparisons to dogs the idea of fidelity which usually dominates with Balzac, gives place to the idea of servility and submissiveness: "Sur le palier Jean-Jacques couché comme un chien" (p. 193); "Il guettait les mouvements de cette créature comme un chien guette les moindres gestes de son maître" (p. 203).

In *Eugénie Grandet* the keynote of Grandet's character seems to be expressed in the double figure: "Financièrement parlant, M. Grandet tenait du tigre et du boa; il savait se

1. *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, I, p. 328.



coucher, se blottir, envisager longtemps sa proie, sauter dessus ; puis il ouvrait la gueule de sa bourse, y engloutissait une charge d'écus, et se couchait tranquillement comme le serpent qui digère, impassible, froid, méthodique " (p. 223). The idea with reference to Grandet expressed in the figure persists throughout the book. The tiger appears in two other similes and to it may be related five metaphors such as : " Le beau marquisat de Froidfond fut alors convoyé vers l'œsophage de M. Grandet " (p. 230). Grandet's cruelty, cunning, and impassiveness, his glance that frightens or chills recall the figure of the serpent or the later one of the basilisk (p. 227). Eugénie is referred to most frequently as a bird with its light-hearted innocence or its sad fate : " Semblable à ces oiseaux victimes du haut prix auquel on les met et qu'ils ignorent " (p. 244). Madame Grandet has " une résignation d'insecte tourmenté par des enfants " (p. 238) ; and the same timid meekness is indicated by four other figures : *biche*, *mouette*, *souris*, and *agneau*. Nanon is compared five times to a faithful affectionate dog. Charles is described in the figures in contrast to the natives of Saumur ; he appears as a giraffe — a curiosity — or " un colimaçon dans une ruche, ou...un paon dans quelque obscure basse-cour de village " (p. 246).

*Group I, C.* — The comparisons of man to the plant world have not the intellectual significance of the comparisons to animals and they are relatively infrequent in *Un ménage de garçon* and *Eugénie Grandet*, where they are nearly all based on outward appearance, usually color, with the exception of a few poetic figures in the latter novel : " La Descoings avait pris les tons mûrs d'une pomme de reinette à Pâques " (MG., p. 122) ; " Une vague ressemblance avec ces fruits cotonneux qui n'ont plus ni saveur ni suc " (EG., p. 237) ; " Cette physionomie calme, colorée, bordée d'une lueur comme une jolie fleur éclore " (EG., p. 268) ; " Probe autant qu'une fleur née au fond d'une forêt est délicate " (EG., p. 287).

In the *Lys dans la vallée* there are twenty-two comparisons of woman to a flower, eighteen of them referring directly to

Madame de Mortsauf. A few refer to external appearance only, as : " La pâleur verdâtre des fleurs du magnolia quand elles s'entr'ouvrent " (p. 624) ; but they are usually more intellectual, and they present an elaborate development of the idea expressed in the title of the novel : we see the flower under all conditions : " Le lys... broyé dans les rouages d'une machine en acier poli " (p. 471) ; " Cette fleur, incessamment fermée dans la froide atmosphère de son ménage, s'épanouit à mes regards " (p. 555) ; " Penchant la tête comme un lys trop chargé de pluie " (p. 573) ; " Le lys de cette vallée où elle croissait pour le ciel en la remplissant du parfum de ses vertus " (p. 411) ; " La plupart de mes idées... sont nées là, comme les parfums émanent des fleurs ; mais là verdoyait la plante inconnue qui jeta sur mon âme sa féconde poussière " (p. 422) ; " La renaissance de madame de Mortsauf fut naturelle comme les effets du mois de mai sur les prairies, comme ceux du soleil sur les fleurs abattues " (p. 525). The other comparisons are to plants, trees or fruits : " Ce corps aussi délicat que l'est une plante venue en serre malgré les rigueurs d'un climat étranger " (p. 424) ; " Elle prenait l'attitude d'un saule pleureur " (p. 421) ; " Elle était mortifiée comme le fruit sur lequel les meurtrissures commencent à paraître et qu'un ver intérieur fait prématurément blondir " (p. 578).

*Group I, D.* — The comparisons of man to inanimate objects are as a rule commonplace : they are based usually on similarity of color, form, or qualities of resistance, and interest us chiefly as they differ in the three novels, according to the choice of the object to which man is compared. In the *Lys dans la vallée*, the comparisons are naturally used for poetical effect and are frequently stock forms : " La peau était blanche comme une porcelaine éclairée par une lueur " (p. 424) ; " La raie blanche qui partageait ses cheveux en deux bandeaux semblables aux ailes d'un corbeau " (p. 424) ; " Après avoir effleuré le frais jasmin de sa peau et bu le lait de cette coupe pleine d'amour " (p. 423). In *Un ménage de garçon* the comparisons are chosen rather with the intention of producing



disgust or else an impression of strength: "Son teint couleur de pain d'épice" (p. 206); "Son crâne couleur beurre frais" (p. 147); "Les paupières étaient comme des pellicules d'œuf" (p. 333); "Un tas de linge et de vieilles robes les unes sur les autres, bordées de boue à cause de la saison, tout cela monté sur de grosses jambes" (p. 331); "Les muscles ne tressaillirent pas plus que s'ils eussent été de bronze" (p. 305). "Blancs et immobiles comme des statues de plâtre" (p. 281) forms a striking contrast with "aux jolies statuettes du moyen âge" or "les statues antiques" in the *Lys dans la vallée* (pp. 378, 420), a novel which does not, however, wholly restrict itself to poetic figures, since we find such expressions as: "Ces creux qui font ressembler la nuque de certaines femmes à des troncs d'arbre" (p. 420). In addition to the contrast between the two novels noted, there are other features in the *Lys dans la vallée* that deserve mention: the frequent comparisons to works of art, as illustrated above, and to natural phenomena, such as sky, cloud, etc.: "Ce visage, serein comme un beau ciel après la tempête" (p. 630). In general the comparisons are not confined so strictly to purely physical properties.

*Eugénie Grandet* stands half-way between these two extremes; we find in it parallels for both types: "Leurs figures, aussi flétries que l'étaient leurs habits râpés, aussi plissées que leurs pantalons" (p. 250); "Sa face trouée comme une écumoire" (p. 241); "Il restait inébranlable, âpre et froid comme une pile de granit" (p. 353); "Ses traits, les contours de sa tête... ressemblaient aux lignes d'horizon si doucement tranchées dans le lointain des lacs tranquilles" (p. 268). Pejorative figures, though not so brutal as in *Un ménage de garçon*, still predominate.

In general we may say that the comparisons to inanimate objects are striking; that they produce the impression which Balzac wished to give. Even the poetic comparisons, while not so original, are often very well chosen.

## GROUP II. — FIRST TERM: Human Look or Voice

This group is in the nature of a transition between Group I and Group III. We are dealing with two physical attributes of man — look and speech — but both are considered here according to their moral significance, as expressing the soul of the actor or as affecting those about him.

*Group II, A.* — In the *Lys dans la vallée* the look is represented twenty times as a light or a flame: “ Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il m’avait inondé de lumière ” (p. 446); “ De ses yeux sortaient deux rayons qui versaient la vie à cette pauvre faible créature ” (p. 438). In three figures the look is, as it were, personified by substituting it for the imagination: “ Mon regard se régalaît en glissant sur la belle parleuse, il pressait sa taille, baisait ses pieds ” (p. 419). The rest are more material expressions.

In *Un ménage de garçon* there are six comparisons to flame, while four give the impression of something hard and metallic: “ Un regard de plomb ” (p. 279), or “ Les teintes froides de l’acier ” (p. 269). The five comparisons to flame in *Eugénie Grandet* do not express the idea so baldly: “ La clarté magique de ses yeux, où scintillaient de jeunes pensées d’amour ” (p. 281).

*Group II, B.* — Speech is expressed in the *Lys dans la vallée* four times as light and eight times as a fluid: “ Sa voix qui pénétra mon âme et la remplit comme un rayon de soleil remplit et dore le cachot d’un prisonnier ” (p. 416); “ Quand j’eus subi le choc de ce torrent qui charria mille terreurs en mon âme ” (p. 402). Ten figures represent the speech as something that wounds: “ Tous ces mots étaient des coups de poignard froidement donnés aux endroits les plus sensibles ” (p. 580); “ Le dard envenimé de ses paroles ” (p. 617). Other types are represented by the following examples: music — “ Un son de voix nouveau, comme si l’instrument eût perdu plusieurs cordes, et que les autres se fussent détendues ” (p. 562);

(sounds in nature) — “ Ce ton doux et bas qui faisait ressembler ses phrases à des flots menus, murmurés par la mer sur un sable fin ” (p. 489) ; (material objects) — “ La plaisanterie française est une dentelle avec laquelle les femmes savent embellir la joie qu'elles donnent ” (p. 602).

*Un ménage de garçon* contains one comparison to flame, the rest being to something of more solid texture, — cannon-ball, arrow, knife, — together with such expressions as : “ [Elles] avaient accouché de la réponse suivante ” (p. 234). *Eugénie Grandet* contains two comparisons to music ; the rest are materialistic though not brutally so, possessing in fact little originality : “ Le flux de mots où il noyait sa pensée ” (p. 227) ; “ Ces mots retentirent dans le cœur de la pauvre fille et y pesèrent de tout leur poids ” (p. 287).

### GROUP III. — FIRST TERM : Spiritual Phenomena

This group has to do with the spiritual phenomena within the man, his emotions, desires, passions, thoughts, *etc.*

*Group III, A.* — The comparisons to plants form one of the most striking features of the *Lys dans la vallée*. This conception crops out persistently throughout the book, and the following examples will illustrate some of the varied conditions under which Balzac sees the flowers. “ Des tourments subis en silence par les âmes dont les racines tendres encore ne rencontrent que de durs cailloux dans le sol domestique, dont les premières frondaisons sont déchirées par des mains haineuses, dont les fleurs sont atteintes par la gelée au moment où elles s'ouvrent ” (p. 394) ; “ Ma virilité qui poussait tardivement ses rameaux verts ” (p. 404) ; “ Espérances cultivées sans fruit, incessamment replantées et déracinées ” (p. 618) ; “ S'il y avait en son cœur des endroits friables où je pusse attacher quelques rameaux d'affection ” (p. 403) ; “ D'inépuisables exhalations remueront au fond de votre cœur les roses en bouton que la pudeur y écrase ” (p. 480) ; “ Il respira dans cette vallée les enivrantes odeurs d'une espérance fleurie ”

(p. 435); (*in the autumn*) "L'âme rembrunie" (p. 506); "Ainsi, des orages de plus en plus troubles et chargés de graviers déracinaient par leurs vagues après les espérances les plus profondément plantées dans son cœur" (p. 564); "L'ouragan de l'infidélité semblable à ces crues de la Loire qui ensablent à jamais une terre, avait passé sur son âme en faisant un désert là où verdoyait d'opulentes prairies" (p. 573). Such comparisons, which differ only in mode of expression from many of those listed under Group I, C., appear only sporadically in the other two novels.

*Group III, B.* — The comparisons to fluids in the *Lys dans la vallée* may be divided into three general classes, according to whether the conception is that of a fluid within the soul, a fluid in which the soul bathes, or a fluid in the more general sense, including electricity and effluvia. "Les sentiments courent toujours vifs dans ces ruisseaux creusés qui retiennent les eaux, les purifient, rafraichissent le cœur et fertilisent la vie" (p. 563); "Abimée en ces rêveries orageuses pendant lesquelles les pensées gonflent le sein, animent le front, viennent par vagues, jaillissent écumeuses" (p. 481); "Mon frère aîné semblait avoir absorbé le peu de maternité qu'elle avait au cœur" (p. 405); "Notre puissance s'échappe tout entière sans aliment, comme le sang par une blessure inconnue. La sensibilité coule à torrents" (p. 443); "Océan d'amour où qui n'a pas nagé ignorera toujours quelque chose de la poésie des sens" (p. 566); "Une de ces douceurs infinies qui sont à l'âme ce qu'est un bain pour le corps fatigué: l'âme est alors rafraichie sur toutes ses surfaces, caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds" (p. 473); "Des pensées trempées de mélancolie tombèrent sur mon cœur comme une pluie fine et grise embrume un joli pays après quelque beau lever de soleil" (p. 427); "Rassembler dans l'air les effluves de cette âme" (p. 461).

We find the same type of figures in *Eugénie Grandet* in somewhat less pretentious form: "La compassion, excitée par le malheur de celui qu'elle aime, s'épanche dans le corps entier

d'une femme " (p. 276); " Aussi Charles... ne put-il se soustraire à l'influence des sentiments qui se dirigeaient vers lui en l'inondant, pour ainsi dire " (p. 280); " La pauvre fille... s'abandonna délicieusement au courant de l'amour; elle saisissait sa félicité comme un nageur saisit la branche de saule pour se tirer du fleuve et se reposer sur la rive " (p. 329); " L'âme a besoin d'absorber les sentiments d'une autre âme " (p. 371).

*Group III, C.* — The following examples illustrate the comparisons to flame or light in the *Lys dans la vallée*: " La constante émanation de son âme sur les siens, cette essence nourrissante épanchée à flots comme le soleil émet sa lumière " (p. 421); " Elle me retira la lumière qui depuis six ans brillait sur ma vie " (p. 605); " Le désir serpenta dans mes veines comme le signal d'un feu de joie " (p. 476); " En retour de ma chair laissée en lambeaux dans son cœur, elle me versait des lueurs de ce divin amour " (p. 504); " Plusieurs pensées s'élevèrent en moi comme des lueurs " (p. 450).

The figures in the other novels are of a similar nature, all being more or less happy reworkings of the familiar conception of love, hate, pain, knowledge, etc., as light or fire. " Sa figure... parut s'éclairer aux rayons d'une pensée " (MG., p. 190); " Atteinte par un dernier rayon de maternité " (MG., p. 149); " Mille pensées confuses naissaient dans son âme, et y croissaient à mesure que croissaient au dehors les rayons du soleil " (EG., p. 266); " Dans la pure et monotone vie des jeunes filles, il vient une heure délicieuse où le soleil leur épanche ses rayons dans l'âme " (EG., p. 265).

*Group III, D.* — The physiological expressions in the novels fall into two classes. In the *Lys dans la vallée* forty-seven figures show a confusion between moral and physical conditions of man; the account of the soul-experiences of the two main characters frequently resembles a text-book of physiology: " Une grande quantité de fibres douloureuses qui obligeaient à prendre tant de précautions pour ne le point blesser " (p. 440); " Elle voulait du poivre, du piment pour la pâture du cœur " (p. 566); " Saignant, mais ayant mis un appa-



reil sur ses blessures" (p. 384) ; "Un cœur ulcéré... les affections entachées d'égoïsme" (p. 533). The conception that is involved in the above figures — that is, of the soul as a living physical organism — is definitely expressed in thirty-six figures ; the idea of physical life is impressed the more forcibly in these because the soul is represented as being rather active than passive and appears usually as a man, occasionally as a bird or an animal : "Le corps succombe sous les étreintes de l'âme" (p. 469) ; "Amour horriblement ingrat, qui rit sur les cadavres de ceux qu'il tue" (p. 568) ; "Il s'éveillait en moi des idées qui glissaient comme des fantômes" (p. 436) ; "Que les maladies morales soient des créatures qui ont leurs appétits, leurs instincts, et veulent augmenter l'espace de leur empire comme un propriétaire veut augmenter son domaine" (p. 448) ; "Un visage où les ailes du plaisir avaient semé leur poussière diaprée" (p. 603) ; "Elle, si respectée par le plaisir, qui ne l'avait jamais enlacée de ses engourdissants replis" (p. 604).

The same two divisions appear in *Eugénie Grandet*. "Mais, à son insu, l'égoïsme lui avait été inoculé. Les germes de l'économie politique à l'usage du Parisien, latents en son cœur, ne devaient pas tarder à y fleurir" (p. 319) ; "Peut-être la profonde passion d'Eugénie devrait-elle être analysée dans ses fibrilles les plus délicates ; car elle devint, disaient quelques railleurs, une maladie" (p. 293) ; "Élever à la brochette l'avarice de son héritière" (p. 237) ; "Elle avait conçu l'amour" (p. 339).

A great many of the figures in Group II contain the same conception as those of this class ; if a look or a word acts like a dagger, it must have a physical organism on which to act. But any figure of speech, if carried to its logical conclusion, would necessitate a figurative interpretation of all related phenomena : it must be classified, then, according to the dominant idea. We must decide what phase of the subject the attention of the author was centered upon when he created the figure, and in the above-mentioned figures Balzac is evidently

trying at that particular moment to represent the look and the speech.

*Group III, E.* — The comparisons to music in *Eugénie Grandet* consist merely in the use of the musical terms *crescendo* (p. 247) and *rinforzando* (p. 261), the effect being rather comical. From the *Lys dans la vallée* the following are typical : “ L’interrogation brusque faite à un cœur, un coup donné pour savoir s’il résonne à l’unisson ” (p. 450) ; “ Les gradations . . . de la musique appliquées au concert de nos voluptés ” (p. 603).

*Group III, F.* — In this class are all the concrete expressions of the inner man which do not come under any of the headings above. The source of the comparison ranges from jewels, furniture, and weapons of defence to geometry and natural phenomena.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find nineteen figures referring to various kinds of cloth, thirteen to natural phenomena, and there are thirteen which treat of the heart as a place : “ La comtesse m’enveloppait dans les nourricières protections, dans les blanches draperies d’un amour tout maternel ” (p. 472) ; “ Leur indifférence, engendrée par les déceptions du passé, grossie des épaves limoneuses qu’ils en ramènent ” (p. 405) ; “ Elle entra dans les derniers replis de mon cœur, en tâchant d’y appliquer le sien ” (p. 504). Other typical examples are : “ A l’époque de la vie où, chez les autres hommes, les aspérités se fondent et les angles s’émoussent ” (p. 540) ; “ Mon amour, pris dans la religion comme une image d’argent dans du cristal ” (p. 465) ; “ L’avenir se meuble d’espérances ” (p. 524) ; “ Elle ouvre et ferme son cœur avec la facilité d’une mécanique anglaise ” (p. 611).

The figures in the other novels are of a very similar nature : “ Afin d’envelopper le cœur de cette pauvre mère dans un linceul brodé d’illusions ” (MG., p. 328) ; “ Le grain d’or que sa mère lui avait jeté au cœur, s’était étendu dans la filière parisienne ” (EG., p. 318) ; “ Grandet avait observé les variations atmosphériques des créanciers ” (EG., p. 336).



## GROUP IV. — FIRST TERM : Abstract Relations and Conditions

The figures in this group consist in the representation of a state or act, purely moral or having moral significance, in terms of a corresponding physical circumstance or act. We are still dealing with spiritual phenomena but the point of view is more external. Also the second term of the comparison comes nearer to being purely symbolical, and the figures when developed take on somewhat the appearance of a parable.

Rather than make a separate group, I place here the few figures dealing with pure abstracts. As a rule the abstract quality is expressed in concrete terms only when it is related to a human being, in which case it really represents a moral state.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* about half of the figures are the development of the conception of life as a journey, with the two details of *abîme* and *désert* standing out prominently : " A m'avancer jusqu'au bord des précipices, à sonder le gouffre du mal, à en interroger le fond, en sentir le froid, et me retirer tout ému " (p. 530) ; " Après être descendue dans l'abîme d'où elle put voir encore le ciel " (p. 435) ; " Je soupçonnai un malheur, comme lorsqu'en marchant sur les voûtes d'une cave les pieds ont en quelque sorte la conscience de la profondeur " (p. 427) ; " Cet immense malheur déroulant ses savanes épineuses à chaque difficulté vaincue " (p. 454) ; " Dans ce grand naufrage, j'apercevais une île où je pouvais aborder " (p. 645) ; " Voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre ; quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts sur un sable pailleté entre deux rives vertes et fleuries " (p. 458) ; " Cette pensée m'éleva soudain à des hauteurs éthérées. Je me retrouvai dans le ciel de mes anciens songes " (p. 462) ; " Elle avait habité comme un palais sombre en craignant d'entrer en de somptueux appartements où brillaient des lumières " (p. 325) ; " Je fouille ce monceau de cendres

et prends plaisir à les étaler devant vous " (p. 647) ; " Les étendards de la mort qui flottaient sur cette créature " (p. 630).

Similarly for *Un ménage de garçon* : " Flore éprouvait la sensation d'une femme tombée au fond d'un précipice, elle ne voyait que ténèbres dans son avenir, et sur ces ténèbres se dessinaient, comme dans un lointain profond, des choses monstrueuses, indistinctement aperçues et qui l'épouvantaient. Elle sentait le froid humide des souterrains " (p. 316) ; " Il... n'userait pas si promptement son capital d'existence " (p. 158) ; " Cette enfant qu'il dégrasait " (p. 187) ; " Qu'il jouât, par pitié, la comédie d'une tendresse quelconque " (p. 328) ; " Répugnances pour le vase amer de la science " (p. 187).

The figures in *Eugénie Grandet* present the same types : " La femme... reste face à face avec le chagrin dont rien ne la distrait, elle descend jusqu'au fond de l'abîme qu'il a ouvert, le mesure, et souvent le comble de ses vœux et de ses larmes " (p. 339) ; " A quitter ses tristes pensées, à s'élancer avec elle dans les champs de l'espérance et de l'avenir, où elle aimait à s'engager avec lui " (p. 301).

The figures in this class are the result of a very common process of figurative creation ; the analogies drawn by Balzac between spiritual and physical experiences are such as have in most cases become stereotyped, and it is more difficult to arrive at real originality by reworking the ideas. With Balzac a pretentious expression of these banal conceptions often produces a ludicrous, mock-heroic impression.

#### GROUP V. — FIRST TERM : Acts

This group includes the comparison between two acts, usually purely physical, but always belonging to the same sphere : that is, physical is compared to physical and intellectual to intellectual. The figures are too diversified to be classified, and their creation indicates no great originality. The professions serve most frequently as source for the comparisons, in particular drama, war, finance, and law.

“ Criminelles selon la jurisprudence des grandes âmes ” (LV., p. 604) ; “ Crimes de lèse-amour ” (LV., p. 604) ; “ Mot qui n'était pas encore monnayé ” (LV., p. 426) ; “ Cette veuve, dont le deuil fut orné de quelques galanteries ” (MG., p. 318) ; “ Ils semblaient se désigner le dessert comme le champ de bataille ” (MG., p. 194) ; “ Dans trois jours devait commencer une terrible action, une tragédie bourgeoise sans poison, ni poignard, ni sang répandu ; mais, relativement aux acteurs, plus cruelle que tous les drames accomplis dans l'illustre famille des Atrides ” (EG., p. 341) ; “ Endimanchés jusqu'aux dents ” (EG., p. 301) ; “ L'assemblée se remua en masse et fit un quart de conversion vers le feu ” (EG., p. 251) ; “ En tenant jusqu'au dernier soupir les rênes de ses millions ” (EG., p. 360) ; “ Tous les instruments aratoires dont se sert un jeune oisif pour labourer la vie ” (EG., p. 248) ; “ La ville entière le mit pour ainsi dire hors la loi, se souvint de ses trahisons, des duretés, et l'excommunia ” (EG., p. 353). We find here also the tendency to render the idea more concrete and definite, either by introducing more of the element of physical force or by substituting a specific act for a habit or plan of action.

#### GROUP VI. — FIRST TERM : Inanimate Objects

*Group VI, A.* — In the *Lys dans la vallée* there are fifteen comparisons between objects of a very similar nature : natural objects to natural objects and manufactured objects to manufactured : “ La rivière fut comme un sentier sur lequel nous volions ” (p. 347) ; “ La pluie incessante du pollen, beau nuage qui papillote dans l'air ” (p. 480) ; “ Ces résidus de pore sautés dans sa graisse et qui ressemblent à des truffes cuites ” (p. 397). Here I have placed also one comparison between animals : *(the horse)* “ L'hirondelle du désert ” (p. 573). A castle is compared once to a flower (p. 417) ; the rest of the comparisons are of natural objects to the creations of human

arts — music, poetry, jewelry, cloth, architecture : “ Ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au cœur ” (p. 481) ; “ Les tremblements de la lune dans les pierreries de la rivière ” (p. 444) ; (*effect of light and shadow*) “ Ces jolis jours qui ressemblent à des soieries peintes ” (p. 464) ; “ Une longue allée de forêt semblable à quelque nef de cathédrale, où les arbres sont des piliers, où leurs branches forment les arceaux de la voûte, au bout de laquelle une clairière lointaine aux jours mélangés d'ombres ou nuancés par les teintes rouges du couchant point à travers les feuilles et montre comme les vitraux coloriés d'un chœur plein d'oiseaux qui chantent ” (p. 478).

In *Un ménage de garçon* the comparisons are between objects of very similar external appearance for the purpose of more accurate description. The effect is usually pejorative : “ Un chapeau...découpé comme une feuille de chou sur laquelle auraient vécu plusieurs chenilles... Sa méchante veste ressemblait à un morceau de tapisserie ” (p. 184) ; “ Il n'abandonnait son col de satin qu'au moment où il ressemblait à de la bourre ” (p. 119) ; “ [Le bouilli] disséqué par M. Hochon en tranches semblables à des semelles d'escarpins ” (p. 223) ; “ Ruisseaux qui...ressemblent à des rubans d'argent au milieu d'une robe verte ” (p. 182). The figures in *Eugénie Grandet* resemble rather those of *Un ménage de garçon* ; their effect is frequently comical rather than really descriptive : “ Sa vieille montre...qui ressemblait à un vaisseau hollandais ” (p. 246) ; “ Les huit marches...étaient disjointes et ensevelies sous de hautes plantes, comme le tombeau d'un chevalier enterré par sa veuve au temps des croisades ” (p. 266) ; “ Un bûcher où le bois était rangé avec autant d'exactitude que peuvent l'être les livres d'un bibliophile ” (p. 266).

The figures in this group, especially those that have no poetical pretension, are usually well chosen. They give a rather definite picture of the object in question and also suggest the impression that the author wishes us to receive from the

object 'itself and from the person with whom the object is associated.

*Group VI, B.* — Under this heading I include all personifications and all animation of inanimate objects.

The *Lys dans la vallée* contains two comparisons of inanimate objects to animals, one personification of a part of the body, two of insects, and five of buildings: "La note unique du rossignol des eaux" (p. 436); "Les moulins... donnaient une voix à cette vallée frémissante" (p. 411). There are fourteen personifications of nature: "Une bruyère fleurie, couverte des diamants de la rosée qui la trempe, et dans laquelle se joue le soleil, immensité parée pour un seul regard qui s'y jette à propos" (p. 478); "Des touffes blanches... vague image des formes souhaitées, roulées comme celles d'une esclave soumise" (p. 480). Seven figures present flowers as representing the thoughts and emotions of man: (*bouquet*) "Ce prolixe torrent d'amour" (p. 480); "Des tiges tourmentées comme les désirs entortillés au fond de l'âme" (p. 480). With a great many of these last twenty-one figures, it is hard to decide whether they belong here or in Groups I and III; for instance, the last seven all have to do with the bouquets by which Félix expresses his love to Madame de Mortsau, where in the figures of speech he is simply retranslating the flower language into the original. We are in fact dealing with a secret code rather than with figurative creation. Considering the number of comparisons of women and passions to flowers, the reverse process of the personification is, however, very natural. The two concepts have become almost identical and either may be substituted for the other.

The personifications in the other two novels are, as a whole, decidedly commonplace. In *Un ménage de garçon* the effect is usually comical. In *Eugénie Grandet* six personify the house and furniture. "Ce terne allait avoir vingt et un ans, il atteignait à sa majorité" (MG., p. 121); "L'insulte faite à l'opposition constitutionnelle et au libéralisme dans la personne du sacro-saint journal" (MG., p. 168); "En 1806, bien des

paroisses en France étaient encore veuves" (MG., p. 189), "La maison Grandet reprit sa physionomie pour tout le monde" (EG., p. 339); "Les murs épais présentaient leur chemise verte" (EG., p. 266); "Un marteau qui...frappait sur la tête grimaçante d'un maître clou" (EG., p. 231); "Le bruit que chaque feuille produisait dans cette cour sonore en se détachant de son rameau donnait une réponse aux secrètes interrogations de la jeune fille" (EG., p. 267). Real personification, then, plays an almost negligible part in Balzac's profuse description of inanimate objects.

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## CHAPTER III

### RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF BALZAC'S FIGURES OF SPEECH

Sufficient examples have been given to suggest the main characteristics of the figures of Balzac. In the first place, the comparisons result from intellectually conceived rather than external similarities; there are comparatively few figures based on form and color, and even fewer where these two properties alone dictate the choice of the comparison. There is a strong ulterior motive in such comparisons as that of a man's face to a skimmer, to fresh butter, or to a wrinkled garment, and in the expressions of external similarities between man and animals. On the whole, the most frequent effect of the figures is to give concrete expression to abstract conceptions; they indicate an imagination susceptible to physical impressions and with marked tendencies toward the voluptuous.

Metaphors naturally predominate, being a more normal form of expression; there is, however, a considerable proportion of formal similes, frequently developed along Virgilian lines. A single comparison is often prolonged by a series of similes and metaphors and repeated time after time throughout the book, so that, in spite of the great number of figures, the number of objects from which they are drawn is really not particularly large.

As we have already indicated, there is an intimate relation between the type of figures and the character of the novel; in other words, Balzac renders the figures of speech an efficient auxiliary in the presentation of his dominating ideas. If we except the poetical figures, we find that, though the rest may shock our aesthetic sense, they give a strikingly vivid impression of the character or object in question. This is especially

true in Group I, A, B, and D, Group V, and Group VI, A, where the figures closely follow conventional lines. But even where the figures seem to convey clearly the idea of Balzac, the impression left by them is not altogether pleasing ; and their analysis from a rhetorical and an esthetic point of view reveals more to blame than to praise.

Probably the most general fault is related to the tendency to exaggeration which finds expression in various elements of Balzac's novels : the characters and bank accounts, his hyperboles and broad generalizations. There is much color-heightening by means of figures. This is not necessarily a defect, for a certain amount of exaggeration can be justified from the artistic standpoint in any phase of literary creation ; as to how much can be used to good effect, it is impossible to fix a standard, for this depends on the reader's bent of mind, and on the degree of assimilation of his own ideas to those of the author. Here we find an intimation as to why the estimates of Balzac's work as a whole, or of single works such as the *Lys dans la vallée*, have varied so widely at different periods and with different individuals.

In *Eugénie Grandet* the most pretentious figures grow out of the effort to magnify the import of this *tragédie bourgeoise*, so commonplace in appearance, which Balzac wills to interpret as surpassing the terrible and thrilling dramas enacted in the family of the Atrides. The intrigues for the hand of Eugénie are likened to the struggles of the Medici and Pazzi at Florence ; Eugénie shows more courage, when she replaces the sugar on the table before the eyes of her father, than the woman who sustains with bleeding hands a silken ladder whereby her lover is escaping. Here the figure is pretentious, for a commonplace act is compared to a grandiose one ; but, as expressed, there is really no exaggeration. *Un ménage de garçon* contains exaggerations of power and importance, as when Flore under the domination of Philippe is likened to France in the hands of Napoleon ; but exaggeration here is usually in the direction of excessive materialism, which will be the subject of a later discussion.

The above-mentioned pretentious figures we can accept with a smile at the conscious or unconscious irony of the author; but in the *Lys dans la vallée* the effort to idealize, which appears only sporadically in *Eugénie Grandet*, produces solid masses, as it were, of pretentious poetical figures, which become insipid from their very number and from their character. Nearly all the comparisons to religious emotions, to saints, martyrs, and the like, come under this head; while the comparisons to flowers, fluids, and flames offend by the manner of expression rather than by the basal idea. A single short paragraph containing six distinct figures will serve to illustrate this point:

“ Je lui contai mon enfance et ma jeunesse, non comme je vous l’ai dite, en la jugeant à distance, mais avec les paroles ardentes du jeune homme de qui les blessures saignaient encore. Ma voix retentit comme la hache des bûcherons dans une forêt. Devant elle tombèrent à grand bruit les années mortes, les longues douleurs qui les avaient hérissées de branches sans feuillage. Je lui peignis avec des mots enfiévrés une foule de détails terribles dont je vous ai fait grâce. J’éalai le trésor de mes vœux brillants, l’or vierge de mes désirs, tout un cœur brûlant conservé sous les glaces de ces Alpes entassées par un continuel hiver. Lorsque, courbé sous le poids de mes souffrances redites avec les charbons d’Isaïe, j’attendis un mot de cette femme qui m’écoutait la tête baissée, elle éclaira les ténèbres par un regard, elle anima les mondes terrestres et divins par un seul mot ” (LV., p. 451-52).

When the conception is banal, a pretentious elaboration is all the more disagreeable, and the figure becomes pure verbiage worthy of the *précieuses*: “ Vous m’avez naguère dirigé sagement à travers les voies périlleuses du grand monde ” (LV., p. 545); “ Ce trésor englouti dans les eaux dormantes de l’oubli ” (LV., p. 453); “ Ce regard mouillé... comme un éternel joyau dont les feux brillent aux jours difficiles ” (LV., p. 453); “ Nos âmes, qui, pour ainsi dire, entraient l’une chez l’autre sans obstacle, mais sans y être conviées par le baiser ”

(LV., p. 475); "Renversant le pompeux édifice élevé par sa préférence maternelle" (MG., p. 324); "Drapé sur son lit de mort dans le manteau de la philosophie encyclopédiste" (MG., p. 189); "L'amour vrai, l'amour des anges, l'amour fier qui vit de sa douleur et qui en meurt" (EG., p. 382); "Colifichets de dandy... tous les instruments aratoires dont se sert un jeune oisif pour labourer la vie" (EG., 248).

The prime requisite of a figure of speech is that it should be apt, that it should be suitable to the thing compared. If there is no external resemblance between the two objects, or if the two concepts are not associated in our minds so that they can produce similar intellectual or emotional reactions, the figure is unjustifiable. The effort to magnify the import of the subject under discussion naturally leads the author to compare it to something with which it is incompatible; thus many of the inexact, absurd, and meaningless figures are the result of some form of pretension. The comparison of Félix drinking the tears of Madame de Mortsauf to a man taking the holy communion would be revolting if the comparison were not so incongruous as to be ridiculous. The comparisons to flowers, fluids, and flames have in general no very distinct meaning, and when we are told that the mournful tones of Madame de Mortsauf exhaled an odor like that of cut (decaying?) flowers (LV., p. 573), we are at a loss to relate the two ideas even emotionally. Other examples of questionable clearness and aptness are: "Ma chair laissée en lambeaux dans son cœur" (LV., p. 504); "Un visage où les ailes du plaisir avaient semé leur poussière diaprée" (LV., p. 605); "Son corps ignore la sueur, il aspire le feu dans l'atmosphère et vit dans l'eau sous peine de ne pas vivre" (LV., p. 568). More external is the incongruity in such expressions as: "Une femme... se posa près de moi par un mouvement d'oiseau qui s'abat sur son nid" (LV., p. 408); "Je suis jalouse! dit-elle avec un accent d'exaltation qui ressemblait au coup de tonnerre d'un orage qui passe" (LV., p. 457).

Two examples of improper comparison from *Eugénie Grandet*

are: "Nanon plantée sur ses pieds comme un chêne de soixante ans sur ses racines" (EG., 234); "Le bonhomme sauta sur le nécessaire comme un tigre fond sur un enfant endormi" (EG., p. 361). The first figure is rendered incongruous by the mention of roots: as for the second, if a tiger should attack a sleeping child at all, it would not be in the manner that the passage suggests. When Balzac adds *endormi*, he is forgetting for the moment his figure in the desire to emphasize the helplessness of Eugénie.

The impropriety in the figures of Balzac comes largely from the fact that they are too physical, too materialistic for the thing compared. This is especially true of the *Lys dans la vallée*, while in *Un ménage de garçon*, where everything is placed on a materialistic basis, the figures fit in very naturally, though occasionally the limit seems to be overstepped; "Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours" (MG., p. 333). In the *Lys dans la vallée*, however, the all-pervasive materialism of the figures is displeasing, almost revolting, by contrast with the evident purpose of idealizing. When Félix seeks in the heart of his mother "des endroits friables" where he can attach "quelques rameaux d'affection" (LV., p. 405), when he speaks of a woman as "séchée sur sa tige, faute de sève" (LV., p. 325), or when he compares Madame de Mortsauf to a worm-eaten fruit that is nearing the stage of putrefaction, he is far from the realm of poetic impressions. *Eugénie Grandet* presents a measured use of expressions of materialism in its crudest form. "Un nez . . . flavescent à l'état normal, mais complètement rouge après les repas, espèce de phénomène végétal" (EG., p. 376), and: "La joie semblait s'échapper comme une fumée par les crevasses de son brun visage" (EG., p. 379) are not exactly pleasing to our sensibilities, but they are in accord with the tone of the passage and with the impression produced by the person described.

The continued expression of the abstract by the concrete produces an impression of materialism. Such comparisons, used with discretion, could be made, however, to produce



extremely poetic effects; the fault with many of Balzac's figures is merely that they insist too much on the similarities, they introduce details that mar the poetic suggestion. This can be exemplified by cases where a single word added spoils the figure. We can form a vague conception of thoughts flooding the soul like waves, but when we are told that they "jail-lissent écumeuses" (LV., p. 481), our imagination balks. It is acceptable that the soul should bathe in pleasure, but it is hard to conceive of its being "rafraîchie sur toutes ses surfaces, caressée dans ses plis les plus profonds" (LV., p. 473). Similarly, after a long comparison of Madame de Mortsau to a bit of heather near the Villa Diodati, Balzac adds: "Son corps avait la verdure que nous admirons dans les feuilles nouvellement dépliées" (LV., p. 421). "Un teint cuivré, verdi de place en place" (MG., p. 269) offers an interesting example, in which copper complexion suggested the idea of the green corrosion seen so often on copper vessels.

Finally, we have figures which do not accord with themselves. The incoherence is largely attributable to exuberance of imagination. From the multitude of images that arise in his mind, Balzac does not choose; he adds them one after the other in such quick succession that they frequently overlap. We may define a mixed or incoherent figure as one in which two or more incompatible images are evoked to represent the same object or concept. In order that such a figure may be permissible, it is not sufficient that the figurative expressions should be commonplace; all but one of them must lose entirely the power of producing an image. Until then a sort of intellectual wrench is necessary in order to grasp the meaning, a process which is especially disagreeable to the French mind, with its love of fitness and exactness. In the following examples, the incoherence is comparatively unobtrusive: "Enivré d'ambition par cette femme, Charles avait caressé, pendant la traversée, toutes ces espérances, qui lui furent présentées par une main habile et sous forme de confidences versées de cœur à cœur" (EG., p. 377); "Une teinte de piété passionnée qui



versa dans l'âme de son enfant chérie la lumière de l'amour céleste " (LV., p. 434) ; " Nos âmes étaient en proie à ces bouleversements qui les sillonnent de manière à y laisser d'éternelles empreintes " (LV., p. 466). Each figure, however, presents three or more ideas that do not harmonize, as for instance *en proie*, *bouleversements*, *sillonnent*, and *empreintes*. The tendency of Balzac seems to be to collect all the sense-impressions suggested by an idea and to fuse them into a single figure. A bouquet appears as poetry, light, and music, with a slight personification and a suggestion of a bee : " Ce poème de fleurs lumineuses qui bourdonnait incessamment ses mélodies au cœur, en y caressant des voluptés cachées " (LV., p. 481). More external is the confusion of an arrow and a shot in : " Jamais cet homme n'avait manqué de lui décocher une flèche au cœur. Oiseau sublime atteint dans son vol par ce grossier grain de plomb, elle tomba " (LV., p. 526). " Tu ne connaissais pas ton oncle, pourquoi pleures-tu ? lui dit son père en lui lançant un de ces regards de tigre affamé qu'il jetait sans doute à ses tas d'or " (EG., p. 276) lacks aptness as well as coherence : the glance of an angry father, of a hungry tiger, and of a miser before his gold can be hardly be assimilated into a single concept. The most marked tendency in the *Lys dans la vallée* is to fuse the various conceptions noted in Group III, as when Félix speaks of Madame de Mortsauf as " cette fleur sidérale " (LV., p. 437). Other examples are : " Pour aspirer l'air qui sortait de sa lèvre chargée de son âme, pour étreindre cette lumière parlée avec l'ardeur que j'aurais mise à serrer la comtesse sur mon sein " (LV., p. 449) ; " Je sentis un parfum de femme qui brilla dans mon âme comme y brilla depuis la poésie orientale " (LV., p. 408). Madame de Mortsauf's speech is air surcharged with her soul, it is a light, yet at the same time Félix embraces it as he would the woman herself.

In the light of what has been said, we may analyse certain phases of the intellectual process by which Balzac creates his figures. The continual repetition of practically the same figure

would indicate that, in addition to the figures resulting from a spontaneous operation of the imagination, there are others that grow up out of a preconceived notion of similarity. It is in this last class that the most salient faults occur, resulting from an imperfect analysis of the real relations between the two terms of the comparisons. The human consciousness crowded with concepts is like a sheet of paper on which thousands of overlapping circles of all sizes have been drawn. To make a perfect comparison, one must see in just how far the two concepts coincide, and admit in the expression of the figure of speech nothing that directs the attention away from the common territory; an artistic figure is one in which the reader does not feel that the author has overstepped the limits.

Balzac, who frequently unites concepts that really are related by very unessential traits and that have little common territory, oversteps the limit in both directions. We have already noted, in speaking of figures that are not apt, that he forces a figure in order to make it better suit the idea which he wishes to present<sup>1</sup>. Similarly he tends to add to the figure something that may refer directly to the first term but is out of place as applied to the second. Thus in the tiger-boas comparison of Grandet, the last word *méthodique* refers to Grandet rather than to the serpent. In : " Elle tremblait de laisser cette brebis [Eugénie], blanche comme elle, seule au milieu d'un monde égoïste qui voulait lui arracher sa toison, ses trésors " (EG., p. 364), *trésors* refers to Eugénie and not to the ewe. From such expressions, which arise from the desire to express everything, it is but a step to mixed metaphor; if his mind reverts too strongly to the literal sense, the author may re-express it by an entirely different figure. But it is usually in the other direction that the mind of Balzac is directed. He loses sight of his original idea and develops the figure for its own sake, as for example in : " Son désir va comme le tourbillon du désert. le désert dont l'ardente immensité se peint dans ses

1. See *supra*, p. 32.

yeux, le désert plein d'azur et d'amour, avec son ciel inaltérable, avec ses fraîches nuits étoilées " (LV., p. 568) : " Henriette était l'oiseau chantant ses poèmes orientaux dans son bocage au bord du Gange, et, comme une pierrerie vivante, volant de branche en branche parmi les roses d'un immense volkaméria toujours fleuri " (LV., p. 556). More especially in the cases we have noted of over-emphasis of the materialism, it seems that the image has entirely replaced the original idea in the mind of Balzac. Indeed he often fuses in such a way the figurative and the literal that we are inclined to believe that he loses the ability to distinguish between the two, that he uses the figures without being conscious that he is departing from the normal speech.

The figures indicate also the lack of such critical sense as would naturally belong to a man working more soberly, without such feverish enthusiasm or inspiration of creation : a critical spirit that would restrain his natural tendencies, correct the patent faults, soften the brutality of the materialism, and restrict the number of the figures.

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## CHAPTER IV

### CAUSES OF BALZAC'S FREQUENT USE OF FIGURES

As one may judge from the above, Balzac is exceedingly fond of figures of speech and uses them much more than the average prose writer. His novels at times teem with them : a single comparison is carried out into many ramifications, or one follows another in quick succession, as on page 419 of the *Lys dans la vallée*, where there are fifteen distinct figures. Moreover, a large proportion of the figures shock our sense of propriety in one way or another. On the whole, in quantity and quality they present a somewhat undigested and indigestible mass. Indeed the severe and almost universal criticism of Balzac's style — aside from composition in the broader sense — is largely equivalent to a criticism of his figures of speech, for it is in them that the vulgarity, bad taste, bombast, *galimatias*, and pretentiousness most often find expression. When Sainte-Beuve, Taine, or Faguet wish to illustrate certain bad qualities of Balzac's style, it is his figures of speech that they quote ; and if you remove the figures of speech from a page of his novels, you have as a rule a passage of simple, straightforward prose that does not in any way merit the following not altogether unjustifiable tirade of Pontmartin : “ Quel encombrement ! que de phrases estropiées ! que de pages hydropiques ! que d'obscurités ! que d'afféteries ! que d'emphase ! que de néologismes inacceptables ! que de métaphores incohérentes ! que d'analogies impossibles ! Sous cette richesse apparente que d'embarras et de gêne ! Quelle fatigue pour arriver à faire moins bien en voulant mieux faire, à tout embrouiller en voulant tout dire ! ” The problem that faces us in a study of the figures of Balzac may be formulated in

the following way. Here is a man who in many respects is a master of language and who is constantly trying to find the best expression for his ideas. From his correspondence and from the testimony of his friends we have abundant evidence that he literally tortured himself in his efforts to perfect his style. Then why does he drag in this apparently extraneous mass of figures which seems so often to hinder rather than to aid his expression? Or, to resolve the problem into its three main divisions: Why does Balzac use so many figures? What explanation can we find for the kind of figures that he uses? What impression is made by these figures upon the reader? In the present chapter we are concerned primarily with the first of these questions.

Let us first consider what offers itself as the simplest explanation. The figure of speech is a literary artifice and is frequently used as a stylistic ornament. It is only natural that Balzac in his efforts to attain to an artistic style should seize upon a process which had been effectively used by others and which appeared easy to imitate, since it might be considered to entail only an external grafting. This explanation will account in large measure for the unusually frequent use of figures in the *Lys dans la vallée*. The greater contemporaries of Balzac were consummate stylists; Gautier, G. Sand, Hugo, Lamennais, Mérimée, Chateaubriand, and others were endowed with artistic or poetic natures, and each had built up for himself out of the ruins of classicism a style suitable to his genius: styles which had many admirers in the days when the romantic emphasis on form was at its height, and which today might serve as models for certain genres. Though Balzac would not have accorded stylistic superiority to all of these, the continual harping of the critics on his lack of style worried him, and he determined to show them what he could do when he tried. The *Lys dans la vallée* is an attempt to rewrite *Volupté* and to surpass Sainte-Beuve in his own field of the psychological novel; it was to be a sublime idyl of pure love. He refers several times in his correspondence to the difficulty



that he has in composing it. "J'ai voulu me servir du langage de Massillon et cet instrument-là est lourd à manier <sup>1</sup>." In his effort to write ornately, to make the style match the sublimity of the subject, he has added figure after figure, until he resembles the painter in the *Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* who, in his constant desire to add just one more element of beauty to his canvas, makes of it an unintelligible daub for all others but himself.

But we cannot accept the desire for stylistic adornment as the only or even the chief reason for the frequent use of figurative language: what we find in the *Lys dans la vallée* is simply an exaggeration of a natural stylistic tendency of Balzac. He was already much addicted to the figure of speech, as we see from *Eugénie Grandet*, and we may judge that its use corresponded to some conscious or unconscious need of the author. This brings us to the question of the fundamental purpose of figures. It is true that they may be purely stylistic ornaments, yet even as such they should produce in the reader an impression, an emotional reaction, desired by the author. They serve also to present an idea in a clearer and more forceful manner. In the comparison of an unfamiliar or indescribable object to something well known to the reader, they facilitate expression by the substitution of familiar concepts for a long abstract or technical discussion. The figure is, as it were, a pattern laid down by which the reader is to cut the still shapeless cloth of his thought. The expression would lose effectiveness if we should try to give an accurate description; the figure is more forceful because it is shorter, because it requires an effort of the imagination to grasp the real meaning, which is not directly expressed. The mind is forced to form a definite concrete image, and receives a more vivid and lasting impression. Literal speech might be compared to an electric current passing through a series of wires in contact, and the figure of speech to the spark when the two wires are separated: a metaphor such as "the wings of night"

1. *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Vol. I, p. 277; cf. p. 278.



is really an incorrect expression, causing a break in the continuity of the thought. The greater the distance between the two wires, the brighter the spark will be, up to the point where the current will not make the leap; the stronger the current, the greater the possible leap. Thus the objects compared may become absolutely incompatible, and you have a figure which is virtually meaningless, but an impassioned style such as that of Balzac vitalizes many figures that would fall flat in a cold, classical style with, consequently, a colder, more critical reader. We may suppose then that Balzac sought by the use of the figures to attain to a more adequate and more forceful expression of his ideas. In order to get a better comprehension of this statement, let us consider the problems which would face a Balzac writing in France in the early nineteenth century.

The enforced formation of images is one of the most important elements in vivid writing. Our ordinary modes of expression have become so stereotyped that the words are purely abstract symbols and present no picture to the mind: they may even be used and heard without a full realization of their meaning, because they simply revive the same emotional reaction that was produced when they were heard before. It is true that language is largely a network of originally figurative expressions, — *ivre de joie*, *chef* in its various meanings, or *penser*, etymologically the same as *peser*, — but by constant use figures lose all image-arousing power and become purely abstract. The tendency in language, when such expressions become banal, is to introduce a new expression, as *peser* in a similar meaning to that of *penser*: for the mind must crystalize an abstract conception around concrete phenomena in order to use it. With the French, a supremely intellectual people who deal readily with abstract concepts, this tendency is not so evident. In the development of their language up to the nineteenth century (barring the increase and the more extended use of scientific terms in the second half of the eighteenth), they have striven to limit rather than to extend their vocabulary; they have tended to restrict themselves to a single

word for any one generalized concept and to leave the particular concept to be supplied by the context (cf. the verbs of motion : *aller*, *venir*, *se promener*, *reculer*, or a noun such as *terre*). Each word gathers meaning from the surrounding words, and the word group conveys an idea which the mind grasps with little effort. The French also tended to restrict the number of figurative uses of a given word. There results an admirable clearness, as the essential significance is not obscured by extraneous or non-essential elements. But such expression is suited especially to the transmission of abstract and conventional ideas<sup>1</sup>.

If we study the masters of French literature, we find that, in a majority of cases, they depart little from this standard French mode of expression. We find also that their preëminence is due to artistic imitation of the classics, to delicate psychological analysis, to the expression of the latent passions and aspirations of man, to their charming imagination and fancy, or to their treatment of the problems of philosophy, morality, and society, all presented in a form and style that approaches perfection for the particular genre. But their creations do not give a powerful illusion of life, we do not

1. In English the situation is slightly different, for we have a larger vocabulary and have retained more words relating to the same general concept, some of which, especially those of Anglo-Saxon origin, have kept a strong literal significance (cf. *edge* and *border*). In this way certain figurative expressions which are natural and current retain more of their power of evocation, because they are not so constantly used. By the side of them exist other modes of expression, absolutely literal in the impression they give, which are used unless the writer seeks consciously or otherwise the more vivid form. This abundance may lead to obscurity at times, but as a result of it vividness of expression becomes a more natural characteristic of the language. Also the readiness with which English substitutes substantives for adjectives or adverbs enables us to evoke an image without going out of our way to do so : " star-memories," " violet-breath," " butter-fingered " (note in this connection the recommendations of the Pléiade and such attempted innovations as the famous *pître promontoire* of Victor Hugo). In French, imagery is farther from the line of normal speech and has to be created more consciously and externally. We may find here an explanation of the slowness of response of the average English mind to most French poetry : the images are, when measured by English standards, few in number and lacking in spontaneity.

turn a street-corner expecting to meet one of their characters face to face. Rabelais, Molière and Saint-Simon, however, belong to a smaller group who are preëminently creators. They present not abstractions but real human beings that become personal acquaintances of the reader, social orders that seem as palpable to him as the one in which he lives. There is an intangible something which we can only define by that undefinable term, genius, by which these men impose the creatures of their imagination<sup>1</sup> upon our consciousness in spite of an improbability or even impossibility of their ever having existed. There is something in these authors that appeals to us as do the crude elemental forces of nature; this is reflected in their styles, which do not respect the more conventional ideas of composition. Careless of restraint, they seek a mode of expression conformable to their subjects; one that leaves them unhampered in personal expression; for in the last analysis the pulse of life must be transmitted from the author's own personality. It is interesting to note that the characters of Molière, who almost necessarily made greater concessions to convention, tend more than those of Rabelais and Saint-Simon to become types or abstractions.

My purpose is not to claim that Rabelais, Molière and Saint-Simon outrank the other great writers, but to bring out by the contrast I have made that the author who produces an illusion of life must have greater freedom in the choice of his modes of expression; he must speak a language which itself has life and partakes of the nature of the creator and of the thing created.

Rabelais gave his imagination carte blanche among all the verbal riches of the renaissance, and reveled in metaphors and similes; no author ever had freer range for his genius. And when we read Rabelais, we read him without stylistic prejudice, for there had been set up no conventional standard for his time. The content and the style impress themselves upon us as so intimately related, so perfectly in harmony, that we

1. For Saint-Simon, see *infra*, p. 44.

cannot conceive of his having written in any other manner, and we are ready to class this hilarious, obscene, bewilderingly exuberant raconteur as a literary artist<sup>1</sup>. Molière in a soberer age made free use of vivid, picturesque colloquial words and modes of expression. Modern criticism has weighed the objections offered to this, and has ruled that an author has the right to make his characters speak the language natural to them. Saint-Simon, inasmuch as he copied more closely from nature, may not be called a creator in the same measure as the other two; his imagination does not play so large a part, but his style re-creates, if it does not create. His men and women are creatures of flesh and blood and not the puppets of historical accounts: the illusion of life on the page of a book is equally difficult to procure whether the model really existed or not, for in either case the immediate source is the conception in the mind of the author. Indeed the representation of actualities presents a peculiar danger, in that the mind is frequently not able to distinguish the non-essential among the many elements that crowd in upon the consciousness. Saint-Simon's style caused considerable disturbance when the *Mémoires* first appeared, and it resembles in many ways that of Balzac, with bold figures of speech and a disregard for grammatical and aesthetic niceties<sup>2</sup>.

1. Cf. Pierre de la Juillière, *Les images dans Rabelais*, ZRPh., Beiheft XXXVII. The general types of figures in Rabelais correspond to the more materialistic ones of Balzac. Rabelais shows, for instance, 363 comparisons to animals.

2. Such lines as these of Taine would seem to have been written on Balzac himself: " Cette passion ôte au style toute pudeur. Modération, bon goût littéraire, éloquence, noblesse, tout est emporté et noyé... La cuisine, l'écurie, le garde-manger, la maçonnerie, la ménagerie, les mauvais lieux, il prend des expressions partout. Il est cru, trivial et pétrit ses figures en pleine boue... c'est à ce prix qu'est le génie; uniquement et totalement englouti dans l'idée qui l'absorbe, il perd de vue la mesure, la décence et le respect. Il y gagne la force; car il prend le droit d'aller jusqu'au bout de sa sensation, d'égaliser les mouvements de son style aux mouvements de son cœur... ce style bizarre, excessif, incohérent, surchargé, est celui de la nature elle-même; nul n'est plus utile pour l'histoire de l'âme; il est la notation littérale et spontanée des sensations." Essay on Saint-Simon in *Essais de critique et d'histoire*, pp. 241-251.

Coming now to Balzac we find an interesting page of Gautier: "La langue française, épurée par les classiques du dix-septième siècle, n'est propre lorsqu'on veut s'y conformer qu'à rendre des idées générales, et qu'à peindre des figures conventionnelles dans un milieu vague. Pour exprimer cette multiplicité de détails, de caractères, de types, d'architectures, d'ameublements, Balzac fut obligé de se forger une langue spéciale, composée de toutes les technologies, de tous les argots de la science, de l'atelier, des coulisses, de l'amphithéâtre même. Chaque mot qui disait quelque chose était le bienvenu, et la phrase, pour le recevoir, ouvrait une incise, une parenthèse, et s'allongeait complaisamment. — C'est ce qui a fait dire aux critiques superficiels que Balzac ne savait pas écrire. — Il avait, bien qu'il ne le crût pas, un style et un très beau style, — le style nécessaire, fatal et mathématique de son idée<sup>1</sup>." It is not true, however, that Balzac continued to think that he did not have a good style, for he does not hesitate to affirm that only he, Gautier, and Hugo knew the French language<sup>2</sup>.

In the above quotation Gautier speaks especially of technical terms which had already been carried over into literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and Balzac does make free use of them. But they serve rather to give accurate, scientific descriptions of material objects, of the milieu in which his characters moved: they are an aid, but used alone they belong to the domain of scientific discussion rather than to literature. Balzac needed something more; he felt instinctively that his ideas and impressions could not be adequately reproduced in others by means of conventional French prose, and he could not take refuge in poetry as did so many of his contemporaries for their most passionate expressions, for neither his genius nor his subject matter was poetic. He affirms in many places the author's right to coin new words

1. Gautier, *Portraits contemporains*, p. 410.

2. It is well to note, however, the distinction which Balzac makes when he says of G. Sand: "Sans savoir la langue française elle a le style." *Lettres à l'Etrangère*, I, p. 464.



and expressions to suit his ideas. In speaking of certain Old-French words, he says to his sister: "Quels jolis mots! expriment-ils bien ce qu'ils veulent dire!... Qui a donc le droit de faire l'aumôme à une langue, si ce n'est pas l'écrivain?"

In the *Contes drolatiques*, where he wished merely to tell a story, he had the happy idea of going back and borrowing the rich, picturesque, and unfettered language of the sixteenth century, which he handled with masterly art and charming effectiveness. Even here he probably did not attempt an accurate reproduction of the language of Rabelais; he sought freedom and not a change of masters. Language was an instrument that had to be fashioned to his purpose.

But such a medium was not suitable for modern subjects and the various philosophical and social problems that they involve. Balzac's ideas on modern style are indicated in his criticism of Stendhal, for whom he expresses unbounded admiration in so far as the content of his works was concerned, but "il n'a pas assez soigné *la forme*; il écrivait comme les oiseaux chantent, et notre langue est une sorte de Madame Honesta qui ne trouve rien de bien que ce qui est irréprochable, ciselé, léché<sup>2</sup>." The form of this criticism seems strange as coming from Balzac, but he does not see how Stendhal could expect to express himself in the simple, correct, colorless, figureless style of the eighteenth century<sup>3</sup>.

1. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIV, pp. LVII-LVIII.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 491-92.

3. Balzac was by no means alone in his desire to infuse new blood into the French language. The matter had been discussed in the journals and parliamentary debates. Chateaubriand, M<sup>me</sup> de Staël, Victor Hugo and others had hazarded innovations in vocabulary, syntax, and figurative creations. Stendhal, on the contrary, is an out-and-out reactionary in matter of language. He says in *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823, p. 115): "Il ne faut pas innover dans la langue parce que la langue est une chose de convention. Laissons cette gloire [d'inventer des tours nouveaux] à M<sup>me</sup> de Staël, à MM. de Chateaubriand, de Marechangy, etc... Il est sûr qu'il est plus vite fait d'inventer un tour que de le chercher péniblement au fond d'une *Lettre provinciale* ou d'une harangue de Patru. Une langue est composée de ses tours non moins que de ses mots. Toutes les fois qu'une idée a déjà un tour qui l'exprime clairement, pourquoi en produire un nouveau? Cf. Brunot in: Petit de Julleville, *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature françaises*, Vol. VIII, p. 714.



There is a most interesting paragraph in *Louis Lambert* which, though obscure in places, throws light on Balzac's attitude towards words as expressions of ideas. Louis Lambert is speaking of the fascinating study of the origin and development of words :

“ L'assemblage des lettres, leurs formes, la figure qu'elles donnent à un mot, dessinent exactement, suivant le caractère de chaque peuple, des êtres inconnus dont le souvenir est en nous. Qui nous expliquera philosophiquement la transition de la sensation à la pensée, de la pensée au verbe, du verbe à son expression hiéroglyphique, des hiéroglyphes à l'alphabet, de l'alphabet à l'éloquence écrite, dont la beauté réside dans une suite d'images classées par les rhéteurs, et qui sont comme les hiéroglyphes de la pensée ? L'antique peinture des idées humaines configurées par les formes zoologiques n'aurait-elle pas déterminé les premiers signes dont s'est servi l'Orient pour écrire ses langages ? Puis n'aurait-elle pas traditionnellement laissé quelques vestiges dans nos langues modernes, qui toutes se sont partagé les débris du verbe primitif des nations, verbe majestueux et solennel, dont la majesté, dont la solennité décroissent à mesure que vieillissent les sociétés ; dont les retentissements si sonores dans la Bible hébraïque, si beaux encore dans la Grèce, s'affaiblissent à travers les progrès de nos civilisations successives ? Est-ce à cet ancien esprit que nous devons les mystères enfouis dans toute parole humaine ? N'existe-t-il pas dans le mot *vrai* une sorte de rectitude fantastique ? Ne se trouve-t-il pas dans le son bref qu'il exige une vague image de la chaste nudité, de la simplicité du vrai en toute chose ? Cette syllabe respire je ne sais quelle fraîcheur. J'ai pris pour exemple la formule d'une idée abstraite, ne voulant pas expliquer le problème par un mot qui le rendit trop facile à comprendre, comme celui du *vol*, où tout parle aux sens. N'en est-il pas ainsi de chaque verbe ? Tous sont empreints d'un vivant pouvoir qu'ils tiennent de l'âme, et qu'ils lui restituent par les mystères d'une action et d'une réaction merveilleuses entre la parole et la pensée. Ne dirait-on pas d'un

amant qui puise sur les lèvres de sa maîtresse autant d'amour qu'il lui en communique ? Par leur seule physionomie, les mots raniment dans notre cerveau les créatures auxquelles ils servent de vêtement " (pp. 3-4).

About the same idea is expressed by Taine when he defends the style of Balzac: " Vos mots sont des notations, ayant chacun sa valeur exacte, fixée par la racine et ses alliances ; les siens sont des symboles dont la rêverie capricieuse invente le sens et l'emploi. Il a été sept ans, dit-il, à comprendre ce qu'est la langue française. La vérité est qu'il l'a étudiée profondément, mais à sa façon, comme d'autres qu'on accuse aussi d'être barbares. Pour eux, chaque mot est, non un chiffre, mais un éveil d'images : ils le pèsent, le retournent, le scandent ; pendant ce temps un nuage d'émotions et de figures fugitives traverse leur cerveau. . . le mot est pour eux l'appel soudain de ce monde vague d'apparitions évanouies ! "

The central idea of the paragraph in *Louis Lambert* is that every word presents to the mind an image of the thing that it represents, an idea which is elaborated in a way that illustrates two striking characteristics of Balzac's unscientifically scientific mind. Intolerant of half-way affirmations, he tends to carry any principle to its ultimate conclusion ; not only do concrete terms produce concrete images, but an abstract adjective such as *true* ; and we know that he even holds that the names of people are an index to their character. Secondly, in his mania for logical explanation of all phenomena, he imagines that the power of evocation resides in the actual form of the word and of the letters composing it, and that the form and arrangement of the alphabetic symbols must preserve traces of the primitive status when writing had the form of pictures more or less directly suggesting the idea to be represented. A typical Balzac theory, an ingenious mixing of fact and fancy, but it evidences Balzac's feeling of the need for vivid expression. He claims that the literal expression has the power to evoke the image, but a few lines above he has said

1. *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, pp. 42 ff.

that the impression made by a word becomes more and more indistinct as you advance from the most ancient language towards the modern, and also that rhetorical images are the hieroglyphics of thought. He feels this so much that in this very paragraph he uses numerous figures in order to express his idea.

From what we have said of the nature of figures of speech, it is evident that they do offer at least a partial solution of the problem of stylistic revivification. The possibilities of figurative creation are infinite in number and variety. We have already seen that Balzac uses comparisons in order to convey more adequately, more strikingly, more palpably the desired impression. Note, for example, the vivid picture of the wretched abandoned Rabouilleuse as given by the succession of figures. It all but awakens the physiological reaction of disgust that you would feel in beholding such a scene in real life: "Une femme, verte comme une noyée de deux jours, et maigre comme l'est une étique deux heures avant sa mort. Ce cadavre infect avait une méchante rouennerie à carreaux sur sa tête dépouillée de cheveux. Le tour des yeux caves était rouge et les paupières étaient comme des pellicules d'œuf" (MG., p. 333). Also the figures furnish an escape valve for Balzac's plethora of ideas and his exuberance of imagination: "Les conversations entre camarades étaient dominées par le monde oriental et sultanesque du Palais-Royal. Le Palais-Royal était un Eldorado d'amour où, le soir, les lingots couraient tout mommés. Là cessaient les doutes les plus vierges, là pouvaient s'apaiser nos curiosités allumées! Le Palais-Royal et moi, nous fûmes deux asymptotes dirigées l'une vers l'autre sans pouvoir se rencontrer" (LV., p. 402). Or: "Voyez par quelles voies nous avons marché l'un vers l'autre; quel aimant nous a dirigés sur l'océan des eaux amères, vers la source d'eau douce, coulant au pied des monts sur un sable pailleté, entre deux rives vertes et fleuries. N'avons-nous pas, comme les mages, suivi la même étoile? Nous voici devant la crèche d'où s'éveille un divin enfant qui lancera ses flèches au front des arbres nus, qui nous ranimera le monde par ses cris joyeux, qui par des

plaisirs incessants donnera du goût à la vie, rendra aux nuits leur sommeil, aux jours leur allégresse. Qui donc a serré chaque année de nouveaux nœuds entre nous ? Ne sommes-nous pas plus que frère et sœur ? Ne déliez jamais ce que le ciel a réuni. Les souffrances dont vous parlez étaient le grain répandu à flots par la main du semeur pour faire éclore la moisson déjà dorée par le plus beau des soleils. Voyez ! voyez ! N'irons-nous pas ensemble tout cueillir brin à brin ? " (LV., p. 458). The impression given by such passages may be painful at times, but they represent a superabundant vitality, the overflow of a highly developed sensibility, and should be judged in their setting as regards the work and the author<sup>1</sup>.

Balzac then was drawn instinctively to the figure of speech because it seemed to furnish a more adequate expression for certain phases of his genius ; and, though he may have made many mistakes, we cannot say that he failed in his purpose. I shall later on discuss this point, as to the effect of the style on the reader, giving here only a quotation from Sainte-Beuve, who certainly cannot be accused of favorable prejudice. His praise is given grudgingly and with restrictions : " Il est un peu comme ces généraux qui n'emportent la moindre position qu'en prodiguant le sang des troupes (c'est l'encre seulement qu'il prodigue) et qu'en perdant énormément de monde. Mais, bien que l'économie des moyens doive compter, l'essentiel après tout, c'est d'arriver à un résultat, et M. de Balzac en mainte occasion est et demeure victorieux. — Il commence si bien chaque récit, il nous circonvient si vivement, qu'il n'y a pas moyen de résister et de dire *non* à ses promesses ; il nous prend les mains, il nous introduit de gré ou de force dans chaque aventure. — On froisse la page sous sa main, mais on y revient ; on est ému enfin, entraîné, on se penche malgré soi

1. Compare Saint-Preux excusing himself for figures used in a former letter : " Pour peu qu'on ait de chaleur dans l'esprit, on a besoin de métaphores et d'expressions figurées pour se faire entendre . . . il n'y a qu'un géomètre et un sot qui puissent parler sans figures . . . Mes propres phrases me font rire, je l'avoue, et je les trouve absurdes, grâce au soin que vous avez pris à les isoler ; mais laissez-les où je les ai mises, vous les trouverez claires, et même énergiques " (*La nouvelle Héloïse*, II, p. 16).

vers ce gouffre inassouvi<sup>1</sup>. " What higher praise can an author receive than that he has gained his ends, that he has held your interest, imposed his ideas upon you, and made you accept his creations in spite of yourself. Such praise concerns the style as well as the content, whatever the intention of the critic, for such an impression could not be produced if the style were not in harmony with the content. That is all we can rightly ask of any style. Brunetière says: " Trop souvent il n'a réussi à exprimer sa pensée qu'au moyen d'une multitude de métaphores qui approchent du galimatias<sup>2</sup> "; but these very metaphors give an impression of vigor, or material life, they relieve the monotony and chill of enumeration of detail and abstract analysis, they keep our mind alert by the necessity of forming and relating concrete images, by the continual occurrence of the unexpected which we must fit into the trend of thought. Balzac's world, his philosophy, even his spiritualism and metaphysics are all materialistic and could not possibly be expressed in purely abstract terms; his style is an organic and necessary part of his work, and should not be criticized without taking this fact into account. But, before we can pass final judgment on the merits and demerits of Balzac's figures, we must attempt to explain their character by their relation to Balzac and his subject matter.

1. *Portraits contemporains*, II, pp. 312, note, 313, and 351.

2. *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 294.

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## CHAPTER V

### RELATION OF BALZAC'S FIGURES TO HIS PSYCHOLOGY

The figures of Balzac, then, are the result of an effort, conscious or otherwise, to render his expression more vivid and vigorous, to reproduce more exactly his own sensations in the mind of the reader. We have seen that very often his figures do not produce the impression that he evidently intended they should, that they conceal or becloud his thought instead of expressing it, that they are revolting to our sensibilities. This chapter and the next will be an attempt to explain this situation by isolating certain of the influences which have combined to produce the figures such as we find them. We have already, in Chapter II, treated the question in so far as it concerns the psychological process that results immediately in the production of a figure; what we now have to say is supplementary to the features already noted, and at the same time it serves to explain them, inasmuch as we are getting deeper into the psychological nature of the author. It is an elusive subject and as complex as human nature itself; we cannot hope to be exhaustive, nor can we affirm anything save certain well-defined tendencies, which, while incapable of mathematical proof, present plausible solutions for the literary phenomena which we are discussing. The problem is somewhat simplified by the fact that what we have to explain are faults and excesses rather than excellence. It is easier to explain the fall of an eagle than its flight.

In the first place we must remember that Balzac's attitude towards life is in general anything but idealistic: and the fact that a figure is displeasing to us frequently means, not that the figure is improper from the standpoint of the author, but that we are not willing to accept the conception of life which produced the figure. Balzac's figures are flesh of his flesh, and



they lack certain qualities of delicacy just as he does ; frequently this fact is sufficient explanation for the choice of a comparison.

# I

## INFLUENCE OF THE CHARACTERS ON BALZAC AND ON EACH OTHER

Many figures that seem improper may be explained by the manner in which Balzac conceived and executed his novels. Anecdotes, testimony of friends, and his work itself show to what extent he was obsessed by his characters. He talked of them to his friends as of real men and women, discussing their personalities and their prospects. He would shut himself up for long seasons, sustaining himself almost entirely with coffee, at home for no one but Grandet, Bridau, or Rastignac, living the life of each individual, thinking his thoughts, experiencing his joys and sorrows. The force, verity, and illusion of life in his creations result largely from this ability to subordinate his own personality, to lose himself in his characters. But as a result of this process, we find many expressions coming from the pen of Balzac that would be natural only in the mouth of one of his personages. The figures in *Un ménage de garçon* are usually such as we should expect of the leading character, Philippe Bridau. *La Muse du département* is composed in a style full of conceits and vulgar pretension such as constantly arise in the conversations of Dinah Piédefer and of the journalist Lousteau. From these two Balzac seems to borrow such expressions as : " Sa robe de chambre . . . ce produit incestueux d'un ancien pardessus chiné de Madame Piédefer et d'une robe de feu Madame de la Baudraye " (p. 386) ; " Horticulture des vulgarités " (p. 402) ; " Sa femme exécutait une sonate de paroles et des duos de dialectique " (p. 395) ; " Ces exorbitantes dépenses d'esprit et d'attention " (p. 397) ; " Son feuilleton dans un journal quotidien qui ressemblait au rocher de Sisyphe et qui tombait tous les lundis sur la barbe de sa

plume " (p. 484). *L'Illustre Gaudissart* is especially striking in this respect, as there is only one character of importance. If we compare the figures of Gaudissart with those of Balzac in this *conte* we find it hard to differentiate them. The same is true for the style as a whole; we might imagine that we are reading the memoirs of Gaudissart.

There are possible advantages in this stylistic contagion. The description of a Ilomais in the prose of a Flaubert is not altogether above criticism, for a dual impression is produced on the reader by the character and by the style, and we see the character only through the style, that is, through the eyes of the author who stands aloof. In any of the above-mentioned novels of Balzac the impression on the reader is single and more vivid, for the style and the character are the same: the style simply furnishes a harmonious stage-setting for the actors. On the other hand, an author who composes in this manner loses the use of his critical faculties, he loses the perspective that is necessary in order to restrain and correct his imagination. Also, in a work where there are several distinct characters, one character or one type is likely to dominate the book and the style. Such is the case with *Un ménage de garçon*, even to the point of affecting the very speech of the other characters. The brutal expressions of Joseph, the artist, are especially striking, and his figures in every case but one are based on crude puns or a cynical materialism. In the *Lys dans la vallée*, priests, maids, Natalie, and Lady Dudley all speak the language of Félix and Madame de Mortsauf, and only the carefully constructed character of M. de Mortsauf stands out in strong contrast. There seems to be a certain inflexibility in the mind of Balzac which rendered difficult for him the quick changes of tone and point of view in his novels, and which must have been a constant hindrance to him in his dramatic efforts. One of the merits of *Eugénie Grandet* is that here he seems to have overcome this difficulty. Three characters, Grandet, Eugénie, and Nanon stand out with especial distinctness, and by their mutual reaction they seem to hold the author in restraint.

It is worth while to note here the use of figures by the characters in this novel. There are some forty in the speeches of Grandet; a large number of them are banal, even to the point of being colloquialisms, but they express excellently the attitude of mind of the man, his matter-of-fact brutality and obsession by the idea of money: "Il faut laisser passer la première averse" [*tears of Charles for his father*] (p. 286); "Est-ce que nous ne vivons pas de morts [*as do the crows*] ? Qu'est-ce donc que les successions ?" (p. 272); "Tous ces gens-là me servent de harpons pour pêcher" (p. 244); "Je serai dépouillé, trahi, tué, dévoré par ma fille" (p. 339); "Les écus vivent et grouillent comme des hommes, ça va, ça vient, ça sue, ça produit" (p. 346); "Quand elle aurait doré son cousin de la tête aux pieds" (p. 350). The money element is present in a majority of his figures, but the most interesting are the cases where he expresses other ideas in terms of finance: "Je ne veux pas qu'il t'arrive malheur à l'échéance de ton âge" (p. 342); or the more banal: "Il est sept heures et demie, vous devriez aller vous serrer dans votre portefeuille" (p. 302).

Eugénie uses four figures; they are banally poetical in their sentimentality and in one case rather ludicrous: "Le malheur veille pendant qu'il dort" (p. 278); "Je m'embarquerai sur la foi de votre parole pour traverser les dangers de la vie à l'abri de votre nom" (p. 387). The nine figures used by Nanon are an admirable expression of the plain-spoken, devout peasant: "Il est étendu comme un veau sur son lit et pleure comme une Madeleine" (p. 288); "L'enfant dort comme un cherubin . . . comme s'il était le roi de la terre . . . comme un sabot" (pp. 275-76); "Il y en a qui, pus y deviennent vieux, pus y durcissent; mais lui [Grandet], il se fait doux comme votre cassis, et y rabonnit" (p. 343).

The other figures are in harmony with their users. Deserving of special comment are the eleven metaphors in the letter of Grandet's brother, which, though very materialistic, become poetic in their sombre, impassioned vigor: "J'aurais voulu

sentir de saintes promesses dans la chaleur de ta main, qui m'eût réchauffé " (p. 257) ; " Il ignorait, par bonheur, que les derniers flots de ma vie s'épanchaient dans cet adieu " (p. 256) ; " Je voudrais avoir le bras assez fort pour l'envoyer d'un seul coup dans les cieux, près de sa mère " (p. 256). These expressions seem very natural when we consider the situation of the writer.

## II

### FIGURES RESULTING FROM THE SUBSTITUTION OF IMAGINATION FOR OBSERVATION

If we examine the table given above with a view to determining what purposes guided Balzac in the use of speech, we are struck at once with the fact that nearly all his figures have to do with mankind. It is true that one of the innovations of Balzac in the novels was the importance that he gave to the material surroundings of his characters ; and the description of physical objects takes up a considerable part of these three novels, though he does not go to extremes as in some of the others. But in dealing with physical objects, he does not feel the need of figurative expression, for the literal term brings up a concrete image ; and Balzac, who had an admirable vision for the external aspects of things and a vocabulary overflowing with all the technicalities to express what he sees, feels that he can give a more accurate impression of the object in question by a detailed description than by comparing it with other objects or by imbuing it with life by personification.

It is in dealing with the more intangible phases of life that he feels the need of figurative language, of an expression that substitutes a concrete image for an abstract concept or for spiritual phenomena. In other words he is not a psychologist, he has not the power to paint in abstract terms the internal working of a complex soul. His greatest creations are those in which the character expresses itself almost entirely in actions ; these

external manifestations he chooses with an admirable instinct, so that the character seems alive and real for us; but the psychology remains simple, composed largely of the generalization of elemental principles. These characters, moreover, are materialistic: Balzac moves at ease in the money-payed courts of Grandet's brain. The difficulty comes when it is a question of a delicate and idealized character. He says himself in *Le Lys dans la vallée*: "Lorsqu'une vie ne se compose que d'action et de mouvement, tout est bientôt dit; mais quand elle s'est passée dans les régions les plus élevées de l'âme, son histoire est diffuse" (p. 645).

In the portrayal of character Balzac relies largely on a principle which is derived from the theories of Lavater, for whom he had a most profound respect. Lavater holds that the character of man is revealed, not only by his features, but by his dress, his house, his furniture, all his *milieu*; the little nook of the world in which he fits and which he shapes to suit himself reacts in turn upon him until it becomes his very image<sup>1</sup>.

Balzac stoutly defended these theories, and in applying them he arranged so admirably the *milieu* of his characters that their psychological weakness hardly appears. They fit so naturally into the scheme of things that they seem to be a part of it; remove Madame Vauquier from her *pension* and she becomes a mere shadow. We are inclined at times to believe that Balzac would deny the existence of individual psychology, holding that a man's mind works by fixed laws according to the influences of his surroundings; and it is doubtless true that the author's materialistic conceptions hindered him from developing any extended psychological facility.

But, strange as it may at first seem, it is the inner man that interests Balzac primarily. His purpose is to paint souls, and even to go beyond the sphere of the ordinary psychological

1. Johann Caspar Lavater: *Essai sur la Physiognomonie*. La Haye, 1783-1803, Vol. I, p. 27; cf. F. Baldensperger, "Les Théories de Lavater dans la littérature française," in *Études d'histoire littéraire*, 2<sup>e</sup> série.



novel, to paint them in their deepest and most spiritual expressions: in a word, he aspires to metaphysics. And so, when he begins an extended description of physical objects, he is careful to tell us that it is necessary for the proper understanding of the drama which is to follow. From this external shell he believes he can penetrate to the germ of life within, as he tells us in the opening page of *Facino Cane*: " Chez moi l'observation était déjà devenue intuitive, elle pénétrait l'âme sans négliger le corps ; ou plutôt elle saisissait si bien les détails extérieurs, qu'elle allait sur-le-champ au delà ; elle me donnait la faculté de vivre de la vie de l'individu sur laquelle elle s'exerçait. " He tries to project within the soul his vision for externals, and in doing so he is departing from the realm of observation for that of imagination. Imagination is the mother of figures, and so we are not surprised to hear Valentine say in the *Peau de chagrin*: " L'exercice de la pensée, la recherche des idées, les contemplations tranquilles de la science nous prodiguent d'ineffables délices, indescriptibles comme tout ce qui participe de l'intelligence, dont les phénomènes sont invisibles à nos sens extérieurs. Aussi sommes-nous toujours forcés d'expliquer les mystères de l'esprit par des comparaisons matérielles " (p. 81).

While we are discussing the figures resulting from the substitution of imagination for observation, it is well to note also that often the whole character is largely a product of imagination, which plays a much larger part in the work of Balzac than we are sometimes inclined to admit. He is far from the note-book method of his naturalistic followers, a method which limits the operation of the imagination and especially that phase of imagination that results in figurative creation. As has frequently been stated, it would have been a physical impossibility for Balzac to observe with the minuteness of a Zola or a Goncourt the two thousand characters that he created and followed through the vicissitudes of life: the great amount of his production, the endless correction and reworking, his financial obligations and adventures, his social duties would



not have left him the time. Gautier is the first, I believe, to use in connection with him the very fitting term *voyant*<sup>1</sup>. What he observes in his hurried contact with life is merely a starting point for his imagination; it may lie dormant in his brain for years, fermenting, as it were. He claims to be able to reconstruct a whole human being from a single trait, just as Cuvier reconstructed an extinct animal from a single bone. Thus Camille Maupin bears but little resemblance to her model, George Sand. Similarly such characters as Rastignac, Valentin, Félix de Vandernes, and Louis Lambert are evidently in part biographical<sup>2</sup>, yet a close study shows comparatively few concrete similarities. Similar instances might be cited for other authors, especially of the romantic period; only the method differs. We may have a narrative following closely the facts, with some of the ugly spots gilded over, as in the *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*; we may have an idealisation as in *Graziella*, or a symbol as in *Faust*. Balzac's method seems to have been to start from some characteristic, passion, aspiration, or circumstance in his own life, which he isolates, surrounds with the necessary elements of a separate existence, and carries mercilessly to its logical conclusion. In the person of Louis Lambert, whom he handles with more genuine delicacy and comprehending tenderness than his other characters, we seem to see an effort to discover what would have been his fate, if he had continued in the way of the studies that led to the composing of the youthful essay on the will, and eventually to his sickness and removal from the Collège de Vendôme. The story, being but slightly dependant on external events, remains more personal with Balzac than his other quasi-autobiographies, where the character develops in such a way as to be absolutely distinct from the personality of the author; I might also add that, being largely concerned with psychological phenomena, it abounds in figures of speech.

1. *Portraits contemporains*, p. 63.

2. Cf. the testimony of a friend of Balzac in the years of his literary apprenticeship: Jules de Pétigny in *La France centrale de Blois*, March 4, 1833, cited by Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, pp. 377-81.

This ever active imagination, powerful to the extent of approximating hallucination, very naturally translates itself into figures of speech, especially when the idea is one that Balzac found difficult to express literally. Balzac says that "on exprime mieux ce que l'on conçoit que ce que l'on a éprouvé <sup>1</sup>," but there is a vagueness about the idealized unknown which is only too evident in the hazy impressions that we receive from his figures dealing with the more poetic characters. The significance is not very clear to us, and we wonder whether Balzac himself had any definite conception of what he wanted to say or whether he justifies the criticism of Taine, who says, apropos of Balzac's criticism of Stendhal's style: "Quand votre idée, faute de réflexion, est encore imparfaite et obscure, ne pouvant la montrer elle-même, vous indiquez les objets auxquels elle ressemble; vous sortez de l'expression courte et directe, pour vous jeter à droite et à gauche dans les comparaisons. C'est donc par impuissance que vous accumulez les images; faute de pouvoir marquer nettement dès la première fois votre pensée, vous la répétez vaguement plusieurs fois, et le lecteur, qui veut vous comprendre, doit suppléer à votre faiblesse ou à votre paresse, en vous traduisant vous-même à vous-même, en vous expliquant ce que vous vouliez dire et ce que vous n'avez pas dit. <sup>2</sup>"

Taine was strongly under the influence of Stendhal when he wrote this, but it is true that a figure of speech may conceal a thought or the absence of thought; and if the reader himself has no very definite conception of the subject under discussion, he will pass on, content with the mere sound of the words. On the other hand, as Balzac intimates, you cannot describe a man's soul in the same way that you do his body. Words have some of the qualities of a measuring rod when you are dealing with concrete objects; when you are dealing with abstracts, they are elastic, indefinite, personal. A concrete comparison may be an aid; if a woman suggest a flower to

1. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, I, p. 4.

2. *Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, p. 254.

the author, he may hope to reproduce his impression of the woman in the mind of his reader by comparing her to a flower. But it requires an unerring instinct and a poetic delicacy to choose always the proper comparison, and to suppress or hold in the background those qualities of the physical object that do not harmonize with the impression desired.

On the other hand, a figure of speech is certainly not the only solution for the problem, and the fact that Stendhal, who is primarily a psychologist, rarely departs from literal expression would indicate that it is not the most natural solution, that its use is really a sign of weakness or uncertainty of analysis. Stendhal is perfectly at ease with abstract ideas; he analyses the emotions and thoughts of his characters in their origins, development, and effects, until the soul seems to be laid bare as by a scalpel. An interesting comparison can be made between Flaubert and Balzac, both of whom had a physical rather than an intellectual vision. It goes without saying that neither abstains entirely from abstract analysis; Flaubert resorts occasionally also to concrete comparisons, but his most typical method seems to be that noted by Bourget: "Il considéra qu'une tête humaine est une chambre noire où passent et repassent des images de tous ordres: images des milieux jadis traversés qui se représentent avec une portion de leur forme et de leur couleur; images des émotions jadis ressenties qui se représentent avec une portion de leur délice ou de leur amertume. . . . Pour Flaubert, . . . décomposer scientifiquement le travail d'une tête humaine, c'est analyser ces images qui affluent en elle, démêler celles qui reviennent habituellement et le rythme d'après lequel elles reviennent <sup>1</sup>." In other words, Flaubert lays bare the soul of the character in a certain situation by making him think aloud, by describing the images, usually physical, that present themselves to his mind. The thoughts and images, taken in connection with the situation, give a very definite impression of the mental attitude of the character.

1. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, I, pp. 163 ff.

As for our author, we find Félix de Vandernes trying to explain what he feels by such a succession of figures as : " Je ne saurais expliquer dans quel état je fus en m'en allant. Mon âme avait absorbé mon corps, je ne pesais pas, je ne marchais point, je volais. Je sentais en moi-même ce regard, il m'avait inondé de lumière, comme son *Adieu, monsieur !* avait fait retentir en mon âme les harmonies que contient l'*O filii, ô filiaë !* de la résurrection pascalle. Je naissais à une nouvelle vie. J'étais donc quelque chose pour elle ! Je m'endormis en des langes de pourpre. Des flammes passèrent devant mes yeux fermés en se poursuivant dans les ténèbres comme les jolis vermiseaux de feu qui courent les uns après les autres sur les cendres du papier brûlé. Dans mes rêves, sa voix devint je ne sais quoi de palpable, une atmosphère qui m'enveloppa de lumière et de parfums, une mélodie qui me caressa l'esprit " (LV., p. 446). Such seems to be Balzac's favorite method of depicting the *état d'âme* of his characters, a method that results from a certain incapacity for abstract psychological analysis.

### III

#### RELATION OF FIGURES TO AN ATTITUDE OF MIND

This concrete expression of abstracts is, however, only a phase of the general materializing tendency in the figures. By materialistic I mean, not necessarily the opposite of poetic, but the opposite of idealistic, for, as I have stated before, a figure may be materialistic and poetic at the same time. We find in Balzac very few personifications, and those few show little originality ; there are comparatively few comparisons between things on the same plane ; but the figure of speech is persistently employed to express the human attributes in terms of the animal, plant, and material worlds. In this great predominance of realistic figures we can see a reflexion of the realistic attitude of mind. The realist claims to depict life as it is, but in spite of all the theories to the contrary, it is evident

that really normal life is an unsatisfactory subject for literature : there must be a certain amount of exaggeration, which with the realist takes the form of the insistence on the *bête humaine*. His aim is to assume the attitude of the impartial, impersonal observer, putting nothing of himself in the picture that he paints. Humanity becomes a mere complex organism, a set of cogs whose operations and functions he is to observe and explain : the attention is centered on those phases of human life that are most easily seen, understood, and described : the animal and material side of man's existence. The more spiritual elements are subordinated to the external, in the terms of which they find expression.

When the realist uses figures of speech to express himself, we are justified in expecting just such figures as we find in Balzac : the expression of abstract qualities in terms of what can be seen and felt, the simplification of complex human nature by making it conform to vegetable existence or to the simple psychology of the lower animals. Even when the romantic side of Balzac's nature is uppermost and he tries to idealize his characters, there is little change in this materialistic tendency, which represents the fundamental bent of his mind and imagination : the poetry in the *Lys dans la vallée* is so covered with the dust of earth as to be hardly recognizable.

When mention is made of figurative imagination, the name of Victor Hugo naturally suggests itself. Thanks to M. Huguet's study of Victor Hugo's metaphors, a comparison of his figures with those of Balzac is comparatively simple, and we cannot do better than to quote Huguet's conclusions concerning the general tendency of Hugo's imagination : " D'autre part, nous avons vu comment il donne à tout la vie, et même la volonté, reconnaissant dans les antres des bouches qui crient ou qui bâillent, dans les branches des bras tendus, dans les ronces des griffes méchantes. Comment n'aurait-il pas l'idée de donner à toutes les forces de la nature, avec la volonté, l'intelligence ? [He is attempting to explain the frequent comparison by Victor Hugo of crude nature to the products of human art.] L'océan,



la goutte d'eau, le vent, et même des abstractions, le temps, le hasard, ne peuvent-ils devenir des artistes dont la collaboration tantôt patiente, tantôt brutale, mais toujours infatigable, met des milliers d'années à produire de prodigieux chefs-d'œuvre? L'océan n'est pas toujours la gueule qui dévore le navire, il est aussi la main qui sculpte, ciselle et polit le rocher<sup>1</sup>. " — " On sait comment tout s'anime dans l'imagination de Victor Hugo: la vague, la nuée, le rocher, l'arbre, la fleur. On sait comment partout il distingue les formes et les mouvements de l'homme et de l'animal<sup>2</sup>. " — " Toujours obsédé par l'idée du mystère, des liens invisibles entre tous les êtres, il cherche partout des symboles, la manifestation de rapports que l'intelligence humaine peut tout au plus soupçonner. Ajoutons à cela cette vie consciente qu'il prête volontiers à tout, ... son habitude de comparer l'activité des forces de la nature à l'activité de l'homme, d'admirer la richesse inépuisable de l'univers, la prodigalité qui remplit de diamants l'espace infini sans oublier d'en suspendre un à l'extrémité du brind'herbe<sup>3</sup>. " — " Mais surtout, ce ciel est vivant. Les astres n'éclairent pas le vide, l'indifférent, l'inconscient. Ce sont des flambeaux qui, comme ceux de nos maisons, éclairent la vie et l'activité. Ce sont des yeux qui nous observent, etc<sup>4</sup>. "

Of the figures cited in Huguet's two volumes, substantially all will fall into one of the following three classes:

1) Comparisons between physical objects suggested by external similarities of form and color. In these we note a persistent tendency to compare the crude and natural to a product of human art, a tendency which we have seen expressed in a few figures of the *Lys dans la vallée*.

2) The animations of nature.

3) Comparisons based on a symbolic interpretation of the

1. Huguet, *Le sens de la forme dans les métaphores de Victor Hugo*, p. 299.

2. Huguet, *La couleur, la lumière et l'ombre dans les métaphores de Victor Hugo*, p. 59.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

second term. Some of these correspond externally to the materialistic comparisons of Balzac ; but, by the choice of the comparison and the manner of expression, the concrete concept with Hugo loses its material significance and becomes a pure symbol of an abstract idea, so that the actual concrete expression of an abstract concept is largely neutralized. This group would include a great many figures which are not included in Huguet's classification, such as the representation of conscience as "*la boussole de l'inconnu*" or "*la colonne vertébrale de l'âme*."

Such a use of the figure of speech corresponds to certain romantic tendencies. Prepossessed with his ego, the romanticist infuses his own nature, not only into his characters, but into inanimate objects, which he tries to elevate, to bring nearer to himself. Artistic exaggeration with him is idealistic rather than materialistic. He loves nature because he has breathed life into her, and the sympathy that he receives from her is but a return of what he has given. He sees things colored by his own personality and they tend to become alive, more intimately associated with human activities, or symbolic of higher truths. He sees man and God in nature, whereas the realist sees nature in man.

The comparison I have drawn between Balzac and Victor Hugo becomes dangerous if we attempt to draw from it definite generalizations, but it is suggestive to any one who is trying to formulate Balzac's relation to the romantic school. By the side of the idealistic figures, you will find in the works of Victor Hugo as many if not more materialistic figures, from which, being a great poet, he obtains poetic effects ; but the proportion is much smaller than in Balzac, nor do we find in them the most striking of his figurative creations as is the case with Balzac. But the fact that the idealistic figures are almost negligible in Balzac would indicate that, in spite of his many romantic traits, he lacks a certain attitude towards nature which is characteristic of the romantic authors from Rousseau on, and which finds such a striking manifestation in the figures

of Victor Hugo. There is a corresponding difference when we consider the characters. The romanticist infused his own nature into his creations, and his various characters were really one and the same. Only the conditions changed. This sameness within the individual author is extended to the groups, so that we speak of the romantic hero as of a single type. Such a process is the exception with Balzac. His ego is continually obtruding itself in his work, but it is either distinct from or subordinate to the characters. While the romanticists raised their characters up to their idealized selves, Balzac attained a similar result, without impairing his creative power, by lowering himself as it were to the plane of those whom he described. He had the dramatic power of putting himself in their places, living their lives and thinking their thoughts. Balzac had a susceptible nature, and, being subjected to the same general influences as the romantic authors, he could hardly escape sharing some of their traits, but the fundamental cast of his mind is almost wholly realistic. He is related to the romantic school rather by emotional traits and superficial literary artifices.

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## CHAPTER VI

### RELATION BETWEEN BALZAC'S FIGURES AND HIS IDEAS

In his article on Stendhal, Balzac distinguished three types of contemporary literature : " la littérature des images, " chiefly lyric, represented by Hugo, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Senancour, Gautier and others ; " la littérature des idées, " dealing largely with facts and headed by Stendhal, Musset and Mérimée ; and " l'éclectisme littéraire, " a combination of the two — " le lyrisme et l'action, . . . les images et les idées, l'idée dans l'image ou l'image dans l'idée. " This last school, in which he places Scott, Cooper, Madame de Staël, and George Sand, is his own, for : " Je ne crois pas la peinture de la société moderne possible par le procédé sévère de la littérature du *xvii<sup>e</sup>* et du *xviii<sup>e</sup>* siècle. L'introduction de l'élément dramatique, de l'image du tableau, de la description, du dialogue me paraît indispensable dans la littérature moderne <sup>1</sup>. " This analysis, true in its general outlines, is especially apt in so far as it concerns Balzac himself, for in his work we find a striking mingling of emotion and ideas, of imagination and facts. We are interested here in his powerful imagination and his abundance of ideas, for, as he himself intimates, both ideas and imagination find expression in the figures of speech.

If we examine the figures of Victor Hugo, we find that they reduce themselves in large measure to what we may call pure imagery plus imagination ; in other words the external appearance of objects plays a most important part in his figurative creation, which consists frequently in the mere association of two concrete images ; and, when imagination enters to any considerable extent, it is as pure imagination, which seeks a more subtle, fanciful, or symbolic criterion of comparison. Both processes may be illustrated by a beautiful figure in the

1. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 687 ff.

*Chants du crépuscule* (N° XIV) : a drop of water glistening in the sunlight at the end of a blade of grass is a pearl ; when it falls it is mud. This striking contrast, the contamination of perfect purity, he relates to woman, who also is "perle avant de tomber et fange après la chute." Ideas, to be sure, are not absent from such a comparison, but the association of ideas which produces the figure results entirely from the operation of the imagination.

On the other hand, the figures of Balzac are usually the result of the fusion at white heat of imagination and ideas : his comparisons often result from certain ideas, and in turn they seem to confirm and develop these same ideas, to impose them more powerfully on the mind of Balzac : in fact it seems at times that the idea really originates in a banal figure. This fusion of imagery and ideas is dangerous, for the one is likely to be distorted to make it conform to the other, and with Balzac, as we shall see, it is usually the figure of speech that suffers in its subordination to the idea. Moreover, in order that a comparison should be effective, its meaning should readily be grasped by the reader, and, when it is based on a conception with which he is unfamiliar, it is sure to appear false and ridiculous.

We come now to a detailed study of the relation of ideas to figures, using our table<sup>1</sup> as a guide. It is well to note here that the fact that such a classification as is there made should be so simple, and at the same time so nearly complete, is in itself an indication that there must be some clearly defined underlying principles which cause the figures to fall into these distinct groups. For our present purpose the *Lys dans la vallée* is especially interesting, for, being intimately associated in the mind of the author with the *Études philosophiques*, it offers a most striking example of the fusion of ideas and imagination. Also in the figures of speech and in other manifestations of the same influences that produced them, we find an explanation for the miscarriage of this favorite child of Balzac's

1. See *supra*, Chapter I.



brain. We must get beneath the mere statement of materialism and natural indelicacy, for, from a certain point of view, he seems especially fitted for writing such a work. There is much in his nature that strikes us as poetic: he idealizes purity; always prepossessed with the feminine, he places woman just below the angels and worships her; in his letters, especially the earlier ones, he shows considerable delicacy of appreciation. Strange as it may seem, in a romanesque novel of his youth such as *Argow le Pirate*, where neither ideas nor figures played any important part, we find a young woman who, while resembling in many ways Eugénie Grandet, through all her adventures retains more real feminine charm and delicacy.

When we approach the question of Balzac's system of thought, we note at once a dominant principle expressed in literature, science and philosophy: the unity of creation — a principle which appears under various aspects in the romantic philosophy, and one which, even considered abstractly, encourages figurative creation; for, if things have so many points of resemblance as to be conceived of as a single whole, a multitude of comparisons immediately present themselves to the mind. One of the happiest moments in Balzac's life was when he conceived the idea of joining all his works into a magnificent whole, and he always protested against their being judged on their individual merits. Also he would have humanity conform to the animal world, for, as he states in the *Avant-propos*: "Il n'y a qu'un animal." This idea he develops in the *Études philosophiques* under the influence of Swedenborg, to show that man is but an intermediate stage of development between the animal and the angel. He may live on earth and partake largely of the nature of either; he may like Seraphita become so spiritualized that he loses practically all human traits even before he breaks the bonds of mortality and takes his place among the angels. Similarly the *Recherche de l'absolu* is based on the principle of the unity of the material world. All of these conceptions which floated vaguely in the

minds of others seemed to assume in the mind of Balzac a concrete or mathematical form. They were not theories, but facts capable of scientific and artistic application.

The relation of this general theory to the figures in Group I, as analyzed in Chapter II, is evident. Thirty odd of the comparisons of man to man consist in the substitution of a divine conception for a terrestrial one. Madame de Mortsauf is a sister of charity, a martyr, a saint, or even the deity. Félix offers his love as a priest at an altar; he drinks the tears of Henriette as he would drink the blood of Christ at the holy communion. Naturally, I did not list the mere references to Henriette as an angel, for the idea is so banal that it is almost impossible to revive the figure; in the *Lys dans la vallée* the word *ange* almost supplants *femme* and is used as if it were entirely literal. Altogether there is a distastefully insistent confusion of the carnal and the spiritual emotions. On the other hand, the comparison to animals is equally insistent, in accord with the theory of Balzac that "l'homme est composé de matière et d'esprit : l'animalité vient aboutir en lui et l'ange commence à lui<sup>1</sup>."

The less frequent conception of the conformity of human and plant life is elaborated in twenty-seven figures; comparisons to physical objects, while expressing the same tendency, are more commonplace and more natural, because they are usually based on evident and purely external similarities.

But more striking still is the manner in which Balzac relates the spiritual world to the physical and material, which may be explained by an examination of some of the specific formulations of his theories.

Throughout all of Balzac's novels and correspondence we note a constant and absorbing interest in the sciences. He read widely, consulted living authorities, observed, and — what is more significant — he pondered and theorized for himself<sup>2</sup>. His special inclination was towards the semi-sciences,

1. *Lys dans la vallée*, p. 569; cf. *Les proscrits*, pp. 672-73.

2. Cf. Cabanès, *Balzac ignoré*, especially the later chapters.

the various forms of occultism and mysticism. Theories such as those of his beloved Lavater, Gall, and Mesmer naturally produce materialistic conceptions : if the sentiments, desires and passions of a man can transform his body, that is, if they produce physical reactions, they are readily conceived of as possessing physical attributes. If ideas may be transmitted from one mind to another, or if the will of one man may be imposed on another by a mysterious force which we call animal magnetism, then the idea or the will must have a distinct if not a material existence of its own. Balzac was especially interested in these subjects in his early years, when he wrote most of his *Études philosophiques*. They find very definite expression in *Louis Lambert*, from which I shall give a series of typical quotations : " Ici-bas, tout est le produit d'une SUBSTANCE ÉTHÉRÉE, base commune de plusieurs phénomènes connus sous les noms impropres d'électricité, chaleur, lumière, fluide galvanique, magnétique, etc. L'universalité des transmutations de cette substance constitue ce qu'on appelle vulgairement la matière... Le cerveau est le matras où l'ANIMAL transporte ce que, suivant la force de cet appareil, chacune de ses organisations peut absorber de cette SUBSTANCE, et d'où elle sort transformée en volonté. La volonté est un fluide " (p. 96) ; " Chimistes de la volonté " (p. 35) ; " La volonté pouvait, par un mouvement tout contractile de l'être intérieur, s'amasser ; puis, par un autre mouvement, être projetée au dehors... réagir sur les autres... les pénétrer d'une essence étrangère à la leur " (p. 43) ; " La volonté s'exerce par des organes vulgairement nommés les cinq sens qui n'en sont qu'un seul, la faculté de voir " (p. 96) ; " Le son, la couleur, le parfum et la forme ont une même origine... La pensée qui tient à la lumière s'exprime par la parole, qui tient au son... La colère, comme toutes nos expressions passionnées, est un courant de la force humaine qui agit électriquement " (p. 97) ; " L'attente... n'est si douloureuse que par l'effet de la loi en vertu de laquelle le poids d'un corps est multiplié par sa vitesse " (p. 45).

The idea, briefly stated, is that there is but one substance.

that all forms of matter, all forces that act on matter, all intellectual and spiritual attributes of man are really one and the same, the only difference being of quantity and condition of stability or movement. Hence will, or thought, or passion is only another form of fluidity, light, or sound. The question arises as to how much of this Balzac really believed. His sister states that he put in the mouth of Louis Lambert many of his own opinions that were too advanced for personal expression<sup>1</sup>. The same ideas appear in his antecedent and his subsequent work. He speaks in his own name in *Ursule Mirouet*: "La science des fluides impondérables, seul nom qui convienne au magnétisme, si étroitement lié par la nature de ses phénomènes à la lumière et à l'électricité. . . La phrénologie et la physiognomonie, la science de Gall et celle de Lavater, qui sont jumelles, dont l'une est à l'autre ce que la cause est à l'effet, démontreraient aux yeux de plus d'un physiologiste les traces du fluide insaisissable, base des phénomènes de la volonté, et d'où résultent les passions, les habitudes, les formes du visage et celles du crâne" (p. 55). A priest seeking to explain a dream of Ursule says: "Si les idées sont une création propre à l'homme, si elles subsistent en vivant d'une vie qui leur soit propre, elles doivent avoir des formes insaisissables à nos sens extérieurs, mais perceptibles à nos sens intérieurs quand ils sont dans certaines conditions. Ainsi les idées de votre parrain peuvent vous envelopper" (p. 192).

We are forced to the conclusion that, if Balzac did not believe in his theories, he at least thought he did, for he expresses them here as a science that will complete if not replace the existing sciences, and is very positive in his affirmations in a letter to Dr. Moreau on the receipt of the latter's book on *Le Génie et la folie*<sup>2</sup>. The extreme form of his ideas results partly from his mania for logical explanation, which appears so frequently in his work and which is the fundamental principle of his psychological studies. His mind intuitively

1. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIV, p. XLVI.

2. Cited by Cabanès, *Balzac ignoré*, p. 216.

seeks a plausible solution for the mysterious workings of thought and passion, and, when it fails him, his imagination begins to work, or, to be more exact, imagination and intellect work side by side. It seems more than probable that the former seized upon such expressions as *le feu de l'amour*, *le feu d'un regard*, and *épancher sa tendresse*, which, in the form of the concrete image evoked by the banal figure, reacted on the mind of Balzac and gave form to his vague conceptions; for Balzac really invents very few comparisons, and his boldest figures are merely detailed developments of the idea expressed in the most banal figures of every-day speech. We have already seen his views on the evoking power of words; we know also that in real life he had only to let his mind dwell upon an idea in order to be convinced of its truth. Gautier says of him: "L'idée était si vive qu'elle devenait réelle en quelque sorte; parlait-il d'un dîner, il le mangeait en le racontant; d'une voiture, il en sentait sous lui les moelleux coussins et la traction sans secousse<sup>1</sup>."

Thus the figures are not mere suggestions of symbolic significance, but have a logical basis of similarity; for, even if Balzac in his saner moments would laugh at his theories, he had at least conceived of them as realities, and the figures must represent the existence or the reminiscence of a concrete image. The reaction of theory on figure and of figure on theory had continued until his treatment of humanity is a kind of composite treatise on botany, zoology, physiology, hydraulics, optics, mechanics, etc. Notice in the following passage from *Louis Lambert* the multitude of forms in which the conception 'idea' presents itself to his mind:

"Tout à coup une idée s'élance, passe avec la rapidité de l'éclair à travers les espaces infinis dont la perception nous est donnée par notre vue intérieure. Cette idée brillante, surgie comme un feu follet, s'éteint sans retour: existence éphémère, pareille à celle de ces enfants qui font connaître aux parents une joie et un chagrin sans bornes; espèce de fleur mort-née

1. *Portraits contemporains*, p. 90.



dans les champs de la pensée. Parfois l'idée, au lieu de jaillir avec force et de mourir sans consistance, commence à poindre, se balance dans les limbes inconnus des organes où elle prend naissance ; elle nous use par un long enfantement, se développe, devient féconde, grandit au dehors dans la grâce de la jeunesse et parée de tous les attributs d'une longue vie ; elle soutient les plus curieux regards, elle les attire, ne les lasse jamais : l'examen qu'elle provoque commande l'admiration que suscitent les œuvres longtemps élaborées. Tantôt les idées naissent par essaim, l'une entraîne l'autre, elles s'enchaînent, toutes sont agaçantes, elles abondent, elles sont folles. Tantôt elles se lèvent pâles, confuses, dépérissent faute de force ou d'aliments ; la substance génératrice manque. Enfin, à certains jours, elles se précipitent dans les abîmes pour en éclairer les immenses profondeurs ; elles nous épouvantent et laissent notre âme abattue. Les idées sont en nous un système complet, semblable à l'un des règnes de la nature, une sorte de floraison dont l'iconographie sera retracée par un homme de génie qui passera pour un fou peut-être. Oui, tout, en nous et au dehors, atteste la vie de ces créations ravissantes que je compare à des fleurs, en obéissant à je ne sais quelle révélation de leur nature. Leur production comme fin de l'homme n'est d'ailleurs pas plus étonnante que celle des parfums et des couleurs dans la plante. Les parfums sont des idées peut-être" (p. 44).

The central thought is that ideas have a distinct though dependent existence, and the comparison that dominates throughout the passage is that of a child in its birth and development. But, interwoven in this minutely developed metaphor, we have other terms applied, such as *feu follet*, *fleur*, *jaillir*, *poindre*, *œuvres*, *essaim*, *éclairer*, *système*, *floraison* and *parfums*. The passage offers a most interesting example of the fusion of science and imagination and of the class of figure that is likely to result from such a fusion.

In the *Lys dans la vallée* we find Balzac still obsessed by the ideas upheld so stoutly in *Louis Lambert* ; but in the *Lys*

*dans la vallée* we have not the scientific expression of theories, but figures of speech which reflect those theories in the choice of the comparisons. An examination of the table will show to what extent the imagination of Balzac was influenced by his semi-scientific conceptions. It is not necessary to dwell on the figures drawn from fluids and flames. They have already been analysed<sup>1</sup>, and their relation to what has been said is sufficiently evident. It would naturally be impossible to deduce from each figure a definite scientific conception, but on the other hand Balzac's scientific theories are themselves more than hazy. In theory and figure we find the same attitude of mind and the same channels of thought. In both we find the elaboration of the idea expressed frequently in banal metaphors; this is especially true as regards flame or fire, which appear in various every-day expressions denoting thought, truth, joy, love, anger, despair, or pain. Balzac as a rule merely elaborates and intensifies. The assimilation of the spiritual to the physiological side of man, shown in eighty-three figures, is one of the most fundamental ideas of Balzac and one of his most common literary devices. It is the underlying principle of the citations I have given from *Louis Lambert* and *Ursule Mirouet*. The very numerous comparisons to flowers do not seem to depend on any definitely formulated theory; they seem rather to be used because the idea is essentially a poetic one, which Balzac thought he could make still more poetic by elaborating it and carrying it out in detail. Throughout the whole book he is obsessed by this flower motif, which in the other novels is relatively infrequent. It is evidently a case of auto-intoxication, produced probably by the very title of the book. It is interesting in this connection to compare some of the expressions which Balzac uses in his letters in speaking of Madame de Berny, on whom he modeled the character of Madame de Mortsau. There are two that are especially striking by their similarity to figures already quo-

1. *Supra*, pp. 19-20.

ted from the *Lys dans la vallée*: "A tout moment la mort peut m'enlever un ange qui a veillé sur moi pendant quatorze ans, une fleur de solitude aussi, que jamais le monde n'a touchée et qui était mon étoile" <sup>1</sup> (cf. the mixed figure "une fleur sidérale," LV., p. 437, and others); "Madame de B..., qui, de son côté, penche la tête comme une fleur dont le calice est chargé d'eau" <sup>2</sup> (cf. "Pendant la tête comme un lys trop chargé de pluie," LV., p. 573).

Let us study a little more closely the artistic result of this fusion of ideas and imagination in the *Lys dans la vallée*. The novel is related in the mind of Balzac to the *Études philosophiques* and especially resembles *Séraphita*, Madame de Mortsau being a woman only a little less idealized and spiritualized than Séraphita. The purpose of a majority of the figures in the *Lys dans la vallée*, then, is to idealize, to produce a poetical impression, but his scientific theories dominate, glide in and spoil the effect. It is not only that the figures conform to the realistic tendency towards the concrete expression of the abstract and the comparison of higher to lower life. Though this is opposed to the elevating tendency of the figurative creations of romantic idealism, such comparisons as a woman to a flower or passion to a rushing wave are frequently used with poetic effect. But they must be used with discretion as regards number and form; one must be content to dwell lightly on actual similarities, to confine one's self to a comparison of the abstract qualities present in both terms, or to imbue the material object with symbolic significance. Balzac, by introducing too many physical details into his figures, destroys the poetic as well as the idealistic impression which he intended to produce. Take, for instance, the very pretentious comparison of the soul to a flower, by which Félix begins the story of his life. It represents the roots as reaching down into the domestic soil and finding only hard stones, the first leafage as stripped off by *des mains haineuses*, and the flowers as killed

1. *Lettres à l'Étrangère*, Vol. I. p. 220.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

by the frost just as they are beginning to open (LV., p. 394). All this is logical and is exhaustively analytic, but it is not poetical.

Such expressions result from the clearness with which Balzac visualized his comparisons. Even when we meet, in the midst of real figures, such a banal expression as : "Après le soupir naturel aux cœurs purs au moment où ils s'ouvrent" (LV., p. 453); we cannot but think that this bit of dubious psychology may owe its origin to the association of a mournful sound with something that opens — a door or an oyster. When Félix tells of waiting long and patiently in the presence of Madame de Mortsauf, he says : "J'avais toujours l'espérance de trouver un moment où je me glisserais dans son cœur... J'avais fini par entendre en elle des remuements d'entrailles causés par une affection qui voulait sa place" (LV., 444-45); here Balzac, manifestly, is conceiving of love as something which, excluded from its rightful place in the heart of Madame de Mortsauf, disturbs the other organs in its frantic efforts to gain admission.

We have already remarked that figures based on unfamiliar scientific conceptions are likely to become obscure and ridiculous. Thus the basal conception of a figure may be so evident to the mind of Balzac that he does not realize the necessity of indicating it for the benefit of his readers. In describing Lady Dudley, he says : "Son corps ignore la sueur, il aspire le feu dans l'atmosphère et vit dans l'eau sous peine de ne pas vivre" (LV., p. 568). A veritable Chinese puzzle, the solution of which, however, seems to be later suggested on the same page, where Lady Dudley is compared to an African desert, and then contrasted to Madame de Mortsauf : "L'orient et l'occident : l'une attirant à elle les moindres parcelles humides pour s'en nourrir ; l'autre exsudant son âme, enveloppant ses fidèles d'une lumineuse atmosphère." The basis of both is evidently the conception of the emotions and passions as fluids and flames. Madame de Mortsauf exudes her soul in a sort of liquid flame for the use of others ; while Lady Dudley takes and gives

nothing in return, she replenishes her flaming passion from without and must live in an atmosphere humid with the emotions of others in order to satisfy that passion. To be complete, Balzac adds that her very body does not perspire, thus affirming the interrelation of the physiological and spiritual natures.

Such expressions smack too strongly of the earthy to produce the poetic impression that Balzac desired; he is not satisfied with describing a sentimental reaction by comparing it with the sentiment aroused in the mind by the consideration of a physical object or reaction. When he draws a comparison from a flower, the image takes substance; he sees the roots and the soil around them, the green of the leaves; he smells the perfume of the blossoms and sees them glistening with dew, beaten by the rain, bedraggled with mud, dried by the sun and by the lack of sap, or picked to pieces by the birds. Such vision is a gift, it is in this power of evocation that consists the genius of Balzac. But this evocation of material details is suitable only for those works which we call realistic, and, when Balzac comes out of his natural domain and deals with more spiritualized subjects, the concrete evocation necessarily takes on a more figurative aspect. Hence there are more figures, and they are out of harmony with the subject. Balzac seems to be dimly conscious of the contradiction existing between the two phases of his work when he says in *Louis Lambert*: "Peut-être les mots matérialisme et spiritualisme expriment-ils les deux côtés d'un seul et même fait" (pp. 27-28). A justifiable supposition as far as he was concerned; for when you affirm the supremacy of the spiritual side of man, you have to bring it down to the level of matter before you can explain how it can act on and control matter, unless you are content to leave the connection shrouded in mist and calmly say: "I do not know," which Balzac was not content to do. In his world, then, the spiritual may rule, but it is so absolutely the result of physiological and material influences that one seems to see a negation of spiritualism, of soul, and of moral responsibility.



In conclusion, then, the *Lys dans la vallée*, in Balzac's day, was very popular in certain circles, and we still find critics who speak of it as a masterpiece, but the figures, which represent the general tone of the book, are disconcerting to our moral and esthetic sensibilities, being unsuited to the subject. The reason is evidently that Balzac, while constantly urging us to mount the heights with him, is at the same time steeping us in materialism. Furthermore we are often confused by a mingling of incompatible elements, fused into a single figure. One moment a passion is a flower, and the next it is a star, now a liquid and then a flame. The explanation of these defects is to be found in the complete fusion which takes place in the mind of Balzac between his ideas or theories and his imagination, resulting in figures which for Balzac are not mere symbols, but expressions of real similarity or even identity. He fails apparently to distinguish between the literal and the figurative. Such a process of creation was not conducive to the artistry and restraint that the idealized subject demanded.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE STYLE OF BALZAC, MEASURED BY ITS EFFECTIVENESS

The purpose of this chapter is not primarily to defend the stylistic defects that we have noted and others that have been so often pointed out; it is an attempt to explain certain sensations experienced in reading Balzac, which linger with us and yet which strike us as surprising when, in our more critical moments, we judge him by the ordinary literary standards. Can we say that it is only the content of Balzac's novels that pleases and that the favorable impression is lessened by the style? Is the style a liability and not an asset? Being convinced that the impression produced by the works of Balzac would be impossible if there were not considerable conformity between the style and the subject, if the form and the content were not working to the same end, I have sought to isolate certain elements that offer a psychological explanation of the effect on the reader<sup>1</sup>.

In estimating the merits of the various imaginative processes of Balzac, we have already had occasion to broach the subject of this chapter by noting and explaining the impression that is made by the figures; and, as has been seen, such a discussion naturally extends itself at times to a more general consideration of style, since the figures are frequently the most striking and the most concrete manifestations of general stylistic tendencies. The impression made on the reader is a still more complex problem than that of the origin of the style, for another psychological element is introduced. Yet this element must be taken into consideration, for the very term style presupposes an audience: just as there is no sound without a hearer, there is no style unless there is some one to register

1. Cf. Paul Flat, *Seconds essais sur Balzac*, for the same theme treated from a slightly different angle.

the intellectual vibrations conveyed by the words. When a style is felt as good, it means that the author, his age (usually), his subject, and the reader are in unison. An epic from the pen of Ronsard and a play of Molière as read by Renan may be said to lack a necessary element of style which is present in a work of Chapelain in the hands of his contemporaries. As a consequence of these facts, any estimate of the style of an author must be largely personal, in so far as human nature varies. For this reason I cite frequently passages from critics, which, though mere expressions of opinion, are of value when analysed and justified, in that they give us a basis for broader generalizations.

Herbert Spencer <sup>1</sup> holds that the best style is the clearest, the one that requires the least effort on the part of the reader in order to grasp the meaning. About the same idea we find in the comments on style by Buffon <sup>2</sup>, Renan <sup>3</sup>, and others. Leaving aside the question of literary tradition, such would naturally be the attitude of the philosopher or the man of science, whose interest is centered in the transmission of ideas. The primary function of language is this transmission of abstract conceptions, and the simpler the style the more adequate and unencumbered is its operation on the mind. But the man who would use words to create life and matter has to compete with nature and with the arts that appeal more directly to the senses; he must use language in such a way that its functions are enlarged. The prime requisite in literary creation that aims at the representation of life is that it shall reproduce as vividly as possible in the mind of the reader the emotions, the concepts, and even the physical percepts of the author. If lucidity and beauty can be obtained at the same time, so much the better, but they remain secondary. The purpose is not that the reader should stop and admire the style, but that he should react according to the content.

1. *The Philosophy of Style*.

2. *Discours sur le style*.

3. *Essais de morale et de critique*, p. 344.

The main difficulty is a tendency, especially marked on the part of the hurried modern, to substitute words for ideas. This occurs in his speech as well as in his reading ; it is with phrases that he talks politics and discusses literature and art. An expression which is frequently heard becomes familiar and produces a certain reaction, a vague association of impressions received on former occasions. He does not stop to consider whether he knows the real meaning of the words. In most cases, if pressed for a definition, he would succeed in giving one approximately correct ; but the word is a proxy, and the idea which is never formulated remains in a more or less chaotic state.

Let us take the case of the reader of a piece of smooth correct prose, where every word stands in its proper and logical relation with every other word. The grammatical relations of the words coincide so perfectly with the psychological relations of the ideas that there is little incentive for him to go back of the individual words ; without translating them into definite concepts, it is possible for him to grasp the trend of the idea of the whole. But often this abstract conception that he receives is not real but only a reflection of the words, which disappears soon after the words themselves. Pope solved the difficulty by expressing his ideas in a form that clings to the memory ; a political party or a system of philosophy may have its existence prolonged by the coinage of a happy phrase ; but without the wording the idea merges into that mass of what may be called potential concepts. An exaggerated form of the tendency mentioned is found in the case of a reader whose concentration is poor. He may read a paragraph, aloud even, and at the end have no idea of what he has read. It would seem that the pronunciation was purely mechanical and the words absolutely void of meaning, but for the negative reaction of the mind when the attention is arrested by an unfamiliar word. Moreover, as he goes back to reread the paragraph, the words themselves have a familiar look and sound, showing that the visual and auditory memory was functioning. The same phe-

nomenon is involved when you suddenly realize that you have been hearing a bit of song or verse for years without having any real comprehension of its meaning, as when a verse of the Bible is flooded with significance by personal experience or by merely reading it in a foreign language.

Thus it is possible for the clearest style to be the least effective : it runs so smoothly through the labor-saving machine of our brain that we do not feel the necessity of translating it into definite concepts capable of leaving an impression. Various devices are employed as incentives to this translation of spoken or written thought : the orator has his tone and gestures, the author the mechanical devices of capitals, italics, and paragraphing ; both can use rhetorical devices to focus the attention of the reader or hearer : interrogation, repetition, climax, etc., which are mere external elements of composition ; or antithesis, irony, and hyperbole, which produce a mental reaction in the mind of the reader by making him adjust the statement in order to discover just the shade of meaning which the author wished to convey.

Similar in their effect to these last are the simile and the metaphor, which are, however, much superior, in that they are capable of infinite variety and rejuvenation. Any one of the other figures, being the same wherever you find it, loses quickly its spice of novelty, and by frequent use becomes as ineffective as the mathematical statement. The simile and the metaphor, whose stylistic value we discussed from a slightly different point of view in Chapter III, have the advantage of keeping the mind alert ; they present a difficulty, in solving which the reader becomes active rather than passive, and participates in the mental processes of the author. Take, for instance, the expression of social service as human irrigation. Irrigation does not fit in with our line of thought, our attention is arrested, this word must be translated and assimilated before we can pass on. An image arises : we think of the vast enterprise that is turning the western deserts into flowering gardens ; in order to relate this to social service, the mind



must also produce a definite and detailed image of what the latter means. Then we see that the slums with their infinite possibilities of manhood, undeveloped on account of conditions, are like the deserts, and that the waters which will bring these hidden qualities to the proper flower and fruitage are sanitation, education, economic justice.

A figure, then, unless entirely banal, requires not only that the reader should formulate a mental image, but that he should analyze it sufficiently to find the points of similarity with the object of the comparison. Not only does he use his own faculties to interpret the author's expression, thus impressing the ideas more forcibly on his consciousness, but, if the figure is well chosen, he should be able to grasp the unexpressed ideas of the author or even to go beyond into original creation. Not all the effect is lost, however, if the comparison is only partially apt; the purpose of the figure is usually clear, while on the other hand the reader must call into play his mental faculties and analyze the impression that the author wished to give, before he can pronounce judgment on the propriety of the expression; thus the idea may be conveyed almost as forcibly as by a more exact expression.

Balzac's figures of speech are merely one manifestation of his desire for a more adequate representation of life. He feels the necessity of something that shall keep the minds of his readers alert; he writes in a kind of feverish excitement, and he does not want a purely passive reader. Apropos of the *Physiologie du mariage*, he says: "Il me fallait donc envelopper mes idées et les rouler, pour ainsi dire, dans une forme nouvelle, acerbe et piquante, qui réveillât les esprits en leur laissant des réflexions à méditer<sup>1</sup>"; similarly he speaks admiringly of an article of Lucien de Rubempré "écrit dans cette manière neuve et originale où la pensée résultait du choc des mots, où le cliquetis des adverbes et des adjectifs réveillait l'attention<sup>2</sup>." In this connection a facetious description which

1. *Correspondance*, p. 97.

2. *Illusions perdues*, p. 453.

Balzac gives of his manner of composition is worthy of being cited : "Ce café tombe dans votre estomac . . . ; dès lors tout s'agite : les idées s'ébranlent comme les bataillons de la grande armée sur le terrain d'une bataille, et la bataille a lieu. Les souvenirs arrivent au pas de charge, enseignes déployées ; la cavalerie légère des comparaisons se développe par un magnifique galop ; l'artillerie de la logique accourt avec son train et ses gargousses ; les traits d'esprit arrivent en tirailleurs ; les figures se dressent ; le papier se couvre d'encre, car la veille commence et finit par des torrents d'eau noire, comme la bataille par sa poudre noire .<sup>1</sup>" These citations indicate a rather physical conception of the elements of style, a belief that the attention may be aroused by the mere form and juxtaposition of the words. Balzac is ready to use every weapon at his disposal to storm the citadel of his reader's intelligence.

Many of Balzac's predecessors and contemporaries had felt the need of leaving the traditional paths of composition in the search for a more adequate expression, but Balzac, by his example if not by his theory, remains a pioneer among the greater writers of the nineteenth century ; and, though there is no Balzacian school of style, his influence is evident to one who compares the style of the novel before and after him. In the novel itself, he brought about a great revolution ; he attempted a corresponding revolution in the language<sup>2</sup>, but language, being the common property of the nation and in daily use by every one, is necessarily more bound by tradition than a literary *genre*. To allow an author all the liberties that Balzac wished to take would mean anarchy and chaos, and would defeat the very purpose of language as a medium of intellectual exchange. But when Balzac protested against the inflexibility of language he was voicing an idea which meant a progression and rejuvenation, an idea which was in the air, but which the other great writers were timid about putting into practice ; Balzac

1. *Traité des excitants modernes*, Vol. XX, p. 623.

2. Brunot, in *Petit de Julleville*, Vol. VIII.

was impelled to do so by the very nature of his genius. In the more artistic styles of Flaubert, Zola, and the Goncourts, we find many of his *procédés*, while on the other hand they have profited by his errors, which showed them certain things to be avoided. But it was Balzac who proved that one may ignore upon occasion the conventionalities of art, esthetics, and language, and at the same time write powerfully and effectively ; and, when we see that so many of his imitators, in smoothing off his rough edges, have lost some of the best traits of his creation, we are tempted to believe with Brunetière that his faults may really be the condition of his genius.

For the style of Balzac can grip even those who are hostile, who struggle against his seduction. We have already cited the case of Sainte-Beuve<sup>1</sup> ; here is an additional testimony in which style is specifically mentioned : “ Et malgré tout, il y a dans ce style une puissance de sensualisme, plus encore que de réalisme, qui vous domine et vous entraîne, malgré les révoltes du goût. A travers cette incorrecte et laborieuse prolixité, ces trivialités recherchées, cette affectation du détail ignoble et bas, on sent dans ce style une verve intérieure, intarissable, et dans l'écrivain ce qu'on a si bien appelé *le diable au corps*. Et si *le diable au corps* ne donne à personne ni la grande éloquence, ni la grande poésie, il peut donner, il donne à Balzac, dans tout ce qu'il écrit, je ne sais quelle impérieuse magie et quel prestige qui domptent les esprits les plus rebelles et s'imposent irrésistiblement à la curiosité, sinon à la sympathie<sup>2</sup>. ”

Brunetière, who is more favorably inclined towards Balzac, analyses the causes of his power : “ Dans le roman comme au théâtre, nous nous sommes aperçus que le style ne consistait essentiellement ni dans une correction dont le mérite, en somme, ne va pas au delà de savoir mettre l'orthographe ; ni dans une facilité, dans une abondance, dans un flux de discours qui finissent — ainsi la prose de George Sand — par donner

1. *Supra*, p. 50.

2. E. Caro, *Poètes et Romanciers*, p. 358.

la sensation de la monotonie ; ni dans cette écriture artiste qui a fait le désespoir de Flaubert, mais peut-être et uniquement dans le don de faire *vivant*. Ou plutôt encore : faire vivant, voilà, Messieurs, ce que l'artiste moderne se propose avant tout ! C'est là-dessus que nous le jugeons ; c'est ce qui assure, en dépit des maîtres d'école, la durée de son œuvre ; et, en ce sens, Messieurs, le style, tel que les grammairiens l'entendent, n'est et ne doit être qu'un moyen. . . La vie est quelque chose de mêlé, je ne vois pas pourquoi je ne dirais pas quelque chose de trouble. Elle est le mouvement qui " dérange les lignes. " Elle est confusion, désordre, illogisme, irrégularité. Rien n'est plus divers, et rien n'est plus complexe. On l'altère en la simplifiant ; on l'éteint en la fixant. Changer, muer, évoluer, c'en est la définition même. On ne la saisit un moment, on ne nous en donne l'imitation, l'image, la sensation qu'en se faisant soi-même aussi changeant, pour ainsi dire, aussi souple, aussi ondoyant qu'elle. C'est ce que Molière, Saint-Simon, et Balzac ont essayé de faire. . . C'est aussi l'idée que nous pouvons opposer hardiment à toutes les critiques que l'on a faites ou que l'on fera du style de Balzac<sup>1</sup>. "

Judged from this point of view the effectiveness of a style may be even enhanced by its being at times incorrect. Mere perfection is monotonous, insipid like an over-ripe fruit, while the incorrect, as abnormal and unusual, arrests the attention, and, if the meaning is still clear, the impression may be more lasting ; moreover, as Brunetière says, a certain irregularity and confusion gives what might be called an onomatopœic representation of life. But it requires more genius to be unconventional and effective than to be conventional and correct. The incorrect is not something to be imitated, it must grow up out of the nature of the author and the requirements of his subject, it is personal and human, and through being so it is more appealing. Certain idiosyncrasies of language leave gaps through which we can catch glimpses of the author. A sober

1. *Études critiques*, Vol. VII, pp. 299-300.

faultless style would give us a very imperfect idea of Balzac, his powerful personality and childlike naïveness, his exuberant imagination which brushes aside all restraints of refinement, his eternally active and self-intoxicating mind, his all-pervasive sensuality — and, after all, Balzac is the most interesting character in the *Comédie humaine*. When we balk at the style, it is really the man that is distasteful to us. To borrow from the philosophy of La Rochefoucauld, perfection may be said to be oppressive, painful to our *amour-propre* ; while there is a certain pleasure in being able to pick flaws in genius ; they seem to excuse some of our own, and — to be a little more optimistic concerning human nature — they give us more of a fellow-feeling, a more comprehending sympathy for the author. Balzac's excesses in other directions may well result in some measure from his continual use of figures of speech. When you speak of the arms of a tree, the expression is, strictly speaking, incorrect, and the habit of using words in other than their normal sense tends to make one careless about meanings and relations. Balzac came to feel himself a master of language, which he could mould as putty for his purposes ; from this feeling of mastery to a tendency to misuse there is but a step.

An idea, intimated by Brunetière in the passage quoted above, is more definitely expressed by Hippolyte Castille : “ On lit un roman de M. de Balzac avec ce genre d'intérêt que l'on prend à regarder passer l'émeute dans la rue <sup>1</sup>. ” And we do get something of the impression of dodging through a motley throng on a crowded street, where we see the woman in silks and furs jostling the laborer on his way home from work, the tired office-girl and the giddy searchers after pleasure, the blind beggar and the young couple interested only in themselves ; we hear the cry of the newsboy, the metallic notes of the hand-organ, mingled with the rattle of wheels ;

1. *La Semaine*, 4 oct. 1846, cited by Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 367.



a pell-mell conglomeration of visual and auditory sensations. For some, such a scene has a strange fascination; others even find a morbid pleasure in roaming through the centers of poverty, disease, and insanity; still others prefer the solitude of their rooms or the smooth flow of conventional society. Literary tastes show similar variations. It is true that a man may find pleasure in a book which deals with conditions that would be unbearable to him in real life; there is something of the lure of the unknown, which is denied external manifestation through pride, convention, physical or esthetic barriers. Balzac goes slumming rather too often, but, when one has read enough of him to get the proper perspective, the general impression is of the plethora of variegated life that throngs the streets at certain hours of the day. The multiplicity and complexity of the impressions received by the author renders his style embarrassed and labored, but this fault, so easily avoided by one who has less to say, ceases to be a fault when it helps to reproduce in the mind of the reader the impression of the author.

We have spoken much of the materialism of Balzac, and not in a laudatory manner, but this very materialism, mixed as it is with a certain amount of idealism, intensifies the illusion of life. A poetic character attracts us, appeals to our better natures, but we are reminded rather of what might be than of what we know to be. We have frequently experienced a shock at the realization that the greatest of men and the most lofty of movements have their material and often repulsive sides; the more intimate our association with man, the more does his animal nature stand out, for the major portion of our time and energy is absorbed by the concerns of physical existence. On the other hand, we are frequently surprised at the loftiness of the aspirations and ideals which we find permeating the most prosaic of lives. Balzac emphasizes too much the physical and material side, yet he does not neglect the spiritual side, and his men and women, exaggerated as they are, impress us as creatures of flesh and blood and not as abstractions. The

style, laden with materialism, intensifies this impression by an almost physical reaction upon us. In this connection, a citation of a protesting critic is interesting, as an admission that for adequate description the style must partake of the nature of the thing described. In speaking of Balzac's style, Caro says : " Pour le bien définir il faudrait l'imiter. . . Il a un choix de mots où éclate une sensualité à la fois violente et raffinée, d'une singulière puissance sur l'esprit et d'une contagion presque irrésistible. Si je ne redoutais d'employer ces abominables mots de la science médicale, dont abuse si souvent Balzac, je ne serais pas aussi embarrassé que je le suis pour rendre ma pensée, et je pourrais alors désigner avec précision cette maladie des nerfs qui envahit son imagination tout entière et l'agite convulsivement <sup>1</sup>. "

1. E. Caro, *Poètes et Romanciers*, pp. 355 and 364. Other critics frequently use figures similar to these of Balzac, when they attempt to describe his personality and work. Cf. Taine and Gautier, *op. cit.*

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## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The psychology of style is too delicate and complex a subject to permit of an exhaustive analysis. A complete study of the origin of Balzac's figures would have to take into account every phase of his complex personality, every influence, external or internal, emotional, intellectual, or physical, lasting or momentary, to which he was subjected<sup>1</sup>. These elements do not manifest themselves singly; they combine, they interact, they counteract each other, and the figures, when spontaneous, are formed as naturally as crystals are precipitated from a chemical solution. But in my discussion it has been necessary to isolate the individual elements and treat them as distinct forces; also the definite statement of a mere tendency, necessary in order to specify and explain it, appears to exaggerate its importance and to minimize the many disturbing and contradictory elements. Confusion will result unless we keep in mind that such an isolation of individual tendencies, though unavoidable, is really artificial; that they all combine into a complex personality, through the medium of which several may find expression in the same figure of speech. The following con-

1. Note for example such an expression as: "Qui verse à l'heure dite un thé suave, savamment déplié" (LV., p. 569), in which the peculiar use of *déplié* is probably explained by Balzac's thought of his own precious tea, which he kept in paper covered with hieroglyphics, and the unwrapping of which was a kind of ceremony (cf. Léon Gozlan, *Balzac en pantoufles*, p. 42). Similarly the flowers sent him by his friends the Duchesse de Castries and Louise while he was writing the *Lys dans la vallée* may have suggested certain comparisons to him. Five consecutive letters to Louise express thanks for gifts of flowers, three of them mentioning also the *Lys dans la vallée* (cf. *Correspondance*, p. 262 ff.). Also there are the infinite possibilities of literary influence by such men as Rousseau and Chateaubriand. The similarities between the figures of Balzac and those of Rabelais and Saint-Simon result from a similar bent of mind rather than from imitation.

clusions, interpreted in the light of the above statement, may be considered as the result of our study.

The figures of speech form an important element in Balzac's realistic method. In them he attempts to convey more completely and more vividly his own sensations than it would be possible for him to do with conventional French prose. In his attitude towards language he is related to a general liberalistic tendency of his age, and more especially he follows the lead of others with creative powers similar to his own — Rabelais, Molière, and Saint-Simon — who created for themselves a medium suited to what they had to convey. Possessing a vivid imagination which amounts at times almost to hallucination, Balzac is inclined to hold that a word, even abstract, should produce a concrete image in the mind of the reader ; but he realizes also that such is not the case in the faded modern speech. The logical way to induce the formation of a concrete image that will leave a lasting impression is by the simile and the metaphor.

The figures serve also as an outlet for Balzac's sentimental effusions ; by a succession of comparisons he seems to bathe himself voluptuously in certain emotions. Furthermore, he uses the figures as stylistic ornaments. These two tendencies, which are rather romantic traits, are especially evident in the *Lys dans la vallée*.

While the figures are often effective, a universal verdict of excessiveness needs very little restriction when they are judged from an artistic point of view. There are too many figures, they are frequently too pretentious or too materialistic ; as a result partly of these last two traits, we find many comparisons that are not apt or appropriate, and this fact, together with the occurrence of incoherent figures, would indicate an imperfect analysis of the similarities between the two objects compared.

If we seek an explanation for the form of Balzac's figures, other than indelicacy and lack of artistic and critical sense, the following points suggest themselves :

1) Balzac's faculty of losing himself completely in his characters causes him to use expressions that would be natural only as used by a Lousteau or a Bridau whom he is painting; a strong character tends to set the tone of the book and he influences the expressions even of the other characters.

2) Balzac is primarily interested in the internal workings of the human soul, but not being a psychologist he seizes upon them by an intuitive imagination rather than by observation, and expresses them in terms of something that he can see; while, on the other hand, physical objects, for which he had an admirable vision, are usually described literally. Thus a large proportion of his figures are concrete expressions of spiritual phenomena, and the indefinite impression that they frequently give is probably due to a vagueness of conception on the part of Balzac. The predominating materialism of the figures is related also to the attitude of mind of the realist who sees the animal and material sides of human nature, in contrast to the romanticist, exemplified by Victor Hugo, in whom we find manifested in the figures of speech a tendency to elevate inanimate nature.

3) The most striking feature of Balzac's figures is the fusion of ideas and imagination which they present and as a result of which they fall into well-defined groups according to the conception underlying the comparisons. There is a continual interaction between the conception and the figure: Balzac seems to visualize concretely certain banal figures and to deduce from them a scientific theory of a real relation between the two concepts compared: on the other hand, the materialistic conceptions of human nature, expressed in *Louis Lambert* and growing out of Balzac's general theory of the unity of all creation, are constantly finding expression in the figures of the *Lys dans la vallée*, and sometimes the figure is absolutely meaningless unless we trace out its relations to the quasi-scientific theories of the author. The result is an all-pervasive materialism which jars all the more with the poetic pretension of the book on account of the minuteness of the comparisons.



Balzac visualizes the figures so clearly that he fails to distinguish between the figurative and the literal expressions.

In seeking to explain the effect of Balzac on his readers, there are three points in his style that should be considered :

1) The figure of speech forces the reader to formulate a definite image and concept before he can grasp the significance of what is being said ; thus the idea is more forcibly impressed on him than by a piece of smooth conventional prose, where, since the grammatical and logical relations so nearly coincide, there is no incentive for the formation of concrete images for the individual words. Up to a certain point, the style that requires the greatest mental effort to understand may be the most effective for an author whose purpose is not to transmit abstract ideas but to produce an illusion of life, to create.

2) Certain irregularities and confusion of style give a more graphic picture of life by borrowing some of its qualities ; also, being less conventional, more personal, they bring us into more intimate relations with the author.

3) In the same way, materialism of style may aid in giving a more vivid picture of life as we know it ; the impression given is that of the real as opposed to the ideal.

In short, a study of the figures and the style of Balzac shows that they bear an intimate relation to his complex personality and to his subject matter, and that their operation on the reader is largely due to this fact.

In view of what has been said, we may ask ourselves what will be the fate of Balzac at the hands of future generations. It has been pointed out that artistic perfection of style, being largely a matter of convention, lacks a certain personal appeal. But, since the conventions of art are fairly stable in a given race or group of races, this very impersonality gives a more lasting and more universal character to a literary work ; as customs, interests, ideas, and points of view change, the personal appeal of an author is liable to fade, even for those whose cast of mind would naturally incline them to be enthu-

siastic admirers. This is especially true for an author who represents the mind and soul as so intimately bound up with physical existence ; the universal and eternal nature of the manifestations is obscured by the external elements, which, formerly an aid to convincing realization, become a hindrance when the age has grown either less familiar or less interesting. A literary work, in order to endure, should have a universal appeal either as a work of art or as a document of the human soul, hence it is not improbable that the readers of the real Balzac — not of the author of *Eugénie Grandet* or *Le Père Goriot* — will be more and more restricted to those who will overcome prejudice and mental inertia and put themselves as far as possible in the author's world. For such readers the *Comédie humaine* will always offer an unlimited store of riches. The reading of Balzac satisfies a desire for the representation of life, just as, if I may be pardoned for closing with a physiological figure, an itching is relieved by the contact with a roughened surface which even lacerates the skin.

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Out of the thousands of titles that would be embraced in a full Balzac bibliography, I shall attempt to cite only those which I have found most suggestive in their discussion of Balzac's style or in their appreciation of the complex personality of the man. To these I add under a second rubric certain general works which I have utilized: studies in style and in figurative expression, treatments of the figures in individual authors, etc.

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AND

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

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It was the French Protestant refugees, driven from their homes by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, who for the first thirty years of the eighteenth century played the leading rôle in spreading on the Continent a knowledge of English institutions, science, and literature. They were not authors of the first rank, nor even of the second. They were industrious translators and compilers who through the columns of various literary journals prepared the public for the work of three men of greater talents, two of them men of genius, Béal de Muralt, Voltaire, and the Abbé Prévost <sup>1</sup>. With the coming of these three men it is at last evident that France has turned her face for the first time toward the north. M<sup>me</sup> de Staël is the remote, but none the less the direct, result of the literary atmosphere which was being formed thus early in the eighteenth century. Muralt's *Lettres sur les Anglois et sur les François* are of 1725, though written about 1694 or 1695. They show observation and insight, and were much read <sup>2</sup>, but they gave little space to literature. In fact, toward such matters their tone was distinctly apologetic. Voltaire's contribution consists of the *Discours sur la tragédie* prefixed to *Brutus* and printed in 1731; of the French version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, an advance defense of the *Henriade* published in 1733; and, most important of all, from the standpoint of their wide influence, of the *Lettres philosophiques* which appeared in 1734. All these we shall further

1. Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire*. Paris, 1895, p. 42.

2. They influenced Voltaire and also Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*.

on have occasion to discuss in some detail<sup>1</sup>. Finally came the Abbé Prévost, whom it is customary to consider as the most fully anglicized of all French authors of the period<sup>2</sup>, and as a sort of literary heretic<sup>3</sup> who alone gave himself up to unreserved admiration — often unreasonable admiration — of Shakespear and of English literature in general. Before the publication of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, the Abbé Prévost had already published in 1731 Volumes V to VII of his *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, and in 1733 had begun to issue the *Pour et Contre*. The earlier work contains a few remarks on English literature<sup>4</sup>, in the main very favorable in character. The second, the *Pour et Contre*, was a weekly periodical which appeared on Mondays from 1733 to 1740. It treated a great variety of subjects of most unequal value and interest, but its chief aim was the publication of literary news and criticism written by the editor.

In view of the important position which Prévost holds in the movement of ideas at this time from England to France, and thence over all parts of Europe to which French culture had extended<sup>5</sup>, it seems of special interest to examine his criticism in so far as it deals with English literature, and to determine to how great a degree the conventional estimates of it should, after closer scrutiny, be accepted. Such a study will permit us also to see in formation, as it were, the future celebrated translator of Richardson. The present monograph

1. Boissy's one-act comedy, *Le François à Londres*, is of this period (first played July 19, 1727), but it makes no reference to English literature.

2. Texte, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

3. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*. Paris, 1898, p. 173. Cf., for similar judgements, V. Schröder, *L'abbé Prévost*, 1898, p. 44; F. Baldensperger, "Esquisse d'une histoire littéraire de Shakespeare en France," *Études d'Histoire littéraire*, 2<sup>e</sup> série. Paris, 1910, pp. 159-60. M. Schröder has somewhat modified his opinion in an article entitled "L'abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du dix-huitième siècle*, 1914, pp. 136-37.

4. *Œuvres de Prévost*. Paris, 1810-16, Vol. II, pp. 280-82.

5. The *Pour et Contre* was read in Russia. See André Lirondelle, *Shakespeare en Russie*. Paris, 1912, p. 16.




is designed to be not merely a commentary upon certain articles of literary criticism which formed part of the secondary activity of the author of *Manon Lescaut*, but also an added chapter in the history of literary relations between France and England during the period up to 1740, when Prévost ceased to publish the *Pour et Contre*. However imperfectly this wider aim may be realized, questions of pure fact I have tried to examine with sufficient care to ensure correctness, though I dare not feel confident that I have completely escaped the pitfalls which lie ever in wait. I can only hope to be nearer the minimum than the maximum of error.

Prevost's spelling and punctuation have not been modernized. In certain cases, citations have been given in full which to some readers may seem unduly long. The *Pour et Contre* is not, however, readily accessible, and it seemed, on the whole, wise to give the more important passages in Prévost's own words rather than to leave the reader to trust to my own *résumés* of the author's thought.

In conclusion, I desire to acknowledge my special obligation to Monsieur E. Carcassonne, whose suggestion led to my undertaking this study, and who during its progress made many valuable criticisms and suggestions, and to Professor E. C. Armstrong for permitting me to draw largely upon his experience and judgment in its treatment. I am glad also to renew my thanks to the Library of Princeton University, which generously placed at my disposal its edition of the not easily obtainable *Pour et Contre*, and thus made possible this study of what the Abbé Prévost thought and wrote about English literature.

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## CHAPTER I

### PRÉVOST IN ENGLAND

The relatively little that is known of the life of the Abbé Prévost is due almost entirely to the careful, painstaking study of Henry Harrisse. How indispensable is his work, becomes clear as soon as one reads any study of Prévost prepared without that aid, as for instance M. Anatole France's essay in *le Génie latin*<sup>1</sup>. It seems that, unless the future brings the improbable good fortune of the discovery of new documents, Harrisse has done all that can be done to reconstitute the troubled life of the Abbé. It is unfortunate that of the most important epoch of his whole eventful career, his sojourn in England, we know almost nothing in detail. For this study particularly, it is desirable to gather together the little we do know of that period, the more since Harrisse, though furnishing the documents, has not woven them into a detailed and connected narrative. M. Schröder has performed well that task, but not quite from the same point of view as that which interests us here.

What had been the chief events of Prévost's life before this important period? Student, twice soldier<sup>2</sup>, novice, teacher, priest<sup>3</sup>, he had given proof of great uncertainty, not to say fickleness, as to his vocation, and of a disposition "vif et sensible au plaisir"<sup>4</sup>. He had been in Holland in 1719<sup>5</sup>, and then, as later, unpleasant stories, most improbable in their exaggeration, had been circulated about him. Dom Dupuis,

1. Anatole France, "les Aventures de l'Abbé Prévost," *le Génie latin*, pp. 179-206.

2. H. Harrisse, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 95-96.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 103-04, 113-14.

4. *Pour et Contre*, IV, p. 38.

5. Harrisse, pp. 96-97.

however, a biographer whom HARRISSE considers in general as worthy of confidence, alludes to these stories without committing himself beyond implying that Prévost, according to accepted standards, had in no way dishonored himself, and for the rest gives a very favorable, but by no means improbable, picture. " L'heureuse physionomie dont la nature l'avait favorisé, la douceur de son caractère, les progrès qu'il avait déjà faits dans les belles-lettres, lui ouvrirent la porte des meilleures maisons. Il s'y distingua même par plusieurs productions d'esprit, soit en vers, soit en prose <sup>1</sup>. " Whatever Manons he may have encountered on his way, we know that he returned to France not later than early in November, 1720 <sup>2</sup>, very much overwhelmed by a love affair, in one way or another unfortunate. Replying in the *Pour et Contre* to the stories of Gordon de Percel (Lenglet-Dufresnoy), Prévost says with his customary candor: " Je laisse à juger quels devoient être depuis l'âge de vingt jusqu'à vingt-cinq ans, le cœur et les sentimens d'un homme qui a composé le Cléveland à trente-cinq ou trente-six. La malheureuse fin d'un engagement trop tendre me conduisit enfin au *Tombeau*; c'est le nom que je donne à l'Ordre respectable où j'allai m'ensevelir, et où je demeurai quelque tems si bien mort, que mes parens et mes amis ignorèrent ce que j'étois devenu <sup>3</sup>. " This is at any rate the tone of frankness and explains, if it does not excuse, the unfortunate issue of the vows taken before the Benedictines of Saint-Maur the ninth of November, 1721, " avec, " as he innocently wrote ten years later, " toutes les restrictions intérieures qui pouvoient m'autoriser à les rompre <sup>4</sup>. "

At Saint-Maur, at Saint-Ouen, at Notre-Dame-du-Bec, at the Abbey of Fécamp, at Saint-Germer, at Evreux, at Séz, at the monastery of the Blancs-Manteaux in Paris, Prévost found the next six years certainly full of changes. Finally, late in

1. Cited by HARRISSE, pp. 96-97.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

3. PC., IV, 38-39.

4. Letter from The Hague, Nov. 10, 1731, cited by HARRISSE, p. 163.

1727 or about the beginning of 1728<sup>1</sup>, he entered the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Près<sup>2</sup>, bringing with him probably, since the approbation was accorded the fifth of April, 1728<sup>3</sup>, the first two volumes of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, composed in that case at the Blanches-Manteaux or at Evreux<sup>4</sup>. The licence to print was granted the sixteenth of April<sup>5</sup>.

At Saint-Germain Prévost was not happy. He was put to work at the *Gallia Christiana* and, though HARRISSE has modified his earlier opinion that his work was limited to copying notes, correcting proofs, and translating into Latin what older collaborators had already written in French<sup>6</sup>, yet it is not likely that the task was gay. The story that he wrote alone almost one whole volume of the *Gallia* is, as HARRISSE observes, entirely improbable<sup>7</sup>. In any event, whatever the character of the work, it was wholly unsuited to his ardent imagination already filled with the novel he had in part composed and was evidently continuing, since the third and fourth volumes were approved the nineteenth of November following<sup>8</sup>. The very composition of these novels<sup>9</sup> recalled perforce all the memories of his wanderings and his loves, and made him long to return to the freer, undisciplined life outside. Then too his relations with the other members of the order were not agreeable. It is only necessary to read the satirical sketches traced of them, not bitterly but none the less with keenness and precision, in the third volume of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*<sup>10</sup>, to see how little these men were fitted to be con-

1. HARRISSE, pp. 116-17.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

4. *Loc. cit.*

5. *Loc. cit.*

6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 117-19. For the corrected opinion, see HARRISSE, *la Vie monastique de l'abbé Prévost*, pp. 29-30.

7. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 117-19.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

9. The *Mémoires* are rather a series of separate narratives than a connected whole.

10. Cited by HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 120-24.

genial companions for him. Not that it is necessary to attach great weight to Prévost's complaints in his letter of the eighteenth of October, 1728, to Dom Thibaut, General Superior of the congregation of Saint-Maur at Saint-Germain-des-Prés<sup>1</sup>. "J'ai eu chez vous," he says, "de justes sujets de chagrin... Par quel malheur est-il donc arrivé qu'on n'a jamais cessé de me regarder avec défiance dans la congrégation, qu'on m'a soupçonné plus d'une fois des trahisons les plus noires, et qu'on m'en a toujours cru capable, lors même que l'évidence n'a pas permis qu'on m'en accusât?" Doubtless, between average, matter-of-fact men like the other members of the congregation and an ardent, mercurial, free spirit like Prévost's there had been many misunderstandings, perhaps even meannesses on the one side, and strong provocation on the other. Between the ordinary man, usually deeply occupied with what are called the practical affairs of life, and the genius, more often than not extremely careless of those same practicalities, an *entente cordiale* is rarely possible. Prévost of course ought never to have been in the order. And then too, without doubting in the least that he wrote his letter in good faith, I do not see what in his past life could have justified his fellow members in granting him complete confidence, and perhaps they were not altogether wrong in suspecting a brother who by his own later admission entered the order only with a mental reservation which he considered a justification for his leaving it as soon as he thought wise. One remembers also how the characters of *Cléveland*, if often they were trustful to a degree bordering on simple-mindedness, at other times were no less foolishly suspicious without cause. Perhaps Prévost, in this also a forerunner of Rousseau, imagined ills which did not exist, or rather, which existed in less degree by far. However that may be, he decided to leave Saint-Germain-des-Prés and to pass into a milder branch of the order of Saint Benedict, where he could leave the

1. *Op. cit.*, pp. 138-39.

2. Cited by Harrisse, pp. 134 ff.



*Gallia* behind him and choose "un genre d'étude plus conforme à son génie," as Dom Dupuis tells us<sup>1</sup>.

Willing to comply with the forms, Prévost applied to the Pope and obtained a Brief of Translation, which Mgr. Sabbathier, the Bishop of Amiens, was to "fulminate." In his *Pour et Contre* Prévost gives interesting information as to his mental state at this time. "Le sentiment me revint, et je reconnus que ce cœur si vif étoit encore brûlant sous la cendre. La perte de ma liberté m'affligea jusqu'aux larmes. Il étoit trop tard. Je cherchai ma consolation pendant cinq ou six ans dans les charmes de l'étude. Mes livres étoient mes amis fidèles; mais ils étoient morts comme moi. Enfin, je pris occasion d'un petit mécontentement, et je me retirai<sup>2</sup>." Here, it seems, is the real reason for his departure, the lack of a true vocation, not an actual grievance of any seriousness. Thus, in 1734, after his feelings have had time to cool, he is much nearer the truth than in his letter to Dom Thibaut, and says that he merely used the "petit mécontentement" as a pretext to satisfy what had long been his desire<sup>3</sup>.

But, his Brief of Translation granted, Prévost was guilty of an indiscretion due to his burning impatience to have done once and for all with Saint-Germain-des-Près. He left without waiting for the "fulmination," which he had every reason to think would take place at once, but which was delayed owing to a real or pretended suspicion of the sincerity of his intentions. Efforts were made to induce him to return peaceably, but Prévost, once free, had no desire to give up his

1. Cited by HARRISSE, p. 432.

2. PC., IV, 39.

3. He goes on to say in the rest of the passage: "Quoique l'amour de la liberté m'ait fait quitter la France, la Flèche et Saint-Germain, où j'ai fait mon séjour, sont des noms chers à ma mémoire. La conduite que j'y ai tenue, ne me laisse à craindre aucun reproche, et les bontés qu'on y a eues pour moi excitent encore ma plus vive reconnaissance." PC., IV, 39-40. Otherwise a very significant passage, its value is much lessened by the fact that it is written at London when Prévost was no doubt willing to placate the authorities and obtain freedom to return in peace to France.

newly recovered liberty. As a result the fathers notified the police and demanded his arrest, complaining that "il se promène impunément tous les jours dans Paris<sup>1</sup>." Prévost did not continue his walks in Paris. Remembering no doubt the precedent set by the Protestant refugees ever since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes forty years before, remembering also Voltaire's departure only a little more than two years previously<sup>2</sup>, he set his face toward England. On the sixth of November, 1728, a *lettre de cachet* was issued against him. His departure took place soon after he received news of the government's action<sup>3</sup>.

The position of England as the refuge for the oppressed and as the seeming realization of all the fond dreams of political and religious liberty cherished by the eighteenth century is too well known to be insisted upon. M. Schröder has developed this in connection with Prévost<sup>4</sup>, but perhaps with somewhat too much emphasis upon his unquestioning enthusiasm for things English and his delight in the free presentation of unorthodox views of religion. "Mais ce qui l'étonna et le charma, je crois, plus que tout le reste," says M. Schröder, "ce fut la libre discussion des doctrines religieuses. Certes, lui, le moine défroqué, le bénédictin en rupture de ban, il a dû lire avec passion le *Discours sur la liberté de pensée* que Collins avait publié une vingtaine d'années auparavant (1713), et le *Christianisme sans mystère* de Toland, qui, paru à la fin du dix-septième siècle, avait été condamné au feu par le parlement de Dublin<sup>5</sup>." This matter of Prévost's religious attitude well merits a separate study, without which it would be rash to express too definite an

1. HARRISSE, p. 140.

2. Voltaire arrived in England probably the thirtieth of May, 1726. See J. Churton Collins, *Voltaire, Montesquieu et Rousseau en Angleterre*, 1911, p. 7. M. Foulet sets the date as late as August 15, 1726. *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France*, 1906, p. 19.

3. HARRISSE, pp. 141-42.

4. *L'abbé Prévost*, Chap. II.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

opinion. However, attention may be called to the fact that whenever the Abbé mentions the deists in the *Pour et Contre*, it is to comment upon them unfavorably. "Ne parlons que du célèbre *Toland*. Que d'erreurs et d'absurdités ne trouve-t-on pas dans les œuvres d'un homme qui s'est fait un si grand nom parmi les Anglois? Et s'il a eu pendant sa vie le bonheur d'imposer jusques dans ses livres, quelle impression ne devoit-il pas faire dans les conversations particulières <sup>1</sup>?" This was in the last volume; already in the first he had spoken of "toutes les impiétez et les rêveries antichrétiennes des *Tolands*, des *Collins*, des *Woolstons*, des *Tyndales*, etc. <sup>2</sup>" Other passages in the same tone might be cited <sup>3</sup>. They seem the sincere expression of a man who might indeed have found the confinement of the monastery insupportable, who might have had his moments of large tolerance <sup>4</sup>, but who was none the less firmly set against the deistic movement in general, which he thought to be simply a deliberately malicious attempt to undermine religious orthodoxy. It is true that there is the ever present possibility that this attitude may have been dictated by prudential reasons, but the burden of proof is on him who would read into the text the opposite of what it says. *Cléveland* shows unquestionable traces of deistic influence, even though Prévost announced in the preface his anti-deistic aim. If, however, the hero's conversion seems to-day far from convincing, no doubt it appeared quite otherwise to its author and to many of his readers. M. Anatole France is probably correct in calling Prévost "le moins philosophe des hommes <sup>5</sup>,"

1. PC., XX, 310-11.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 227.

3. On Tyndal, cf. PC., I, 265; III, 318-49; IV, 66-67; on Collins, see PC., XII, 314; on Woolston, PC., I, 49-58; on Chubb, PC., XVI, 13-14.

4. See *Cléveland*, Book IV (*Œuvres*, V, pp. 164 ff.) on the natural religion Cléveland teaches the Abaquis.

5. *Le Génie latin*, p. 189. For a similar opinion see Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits littéraires*, I, pp. 273-74. Cf. MHQ., II, 393, on the death of Saint-Evremond. "C'est ainsi que les plus grands hommes s'aveuglent malheureusement dans l'affaire la plus importante.... je veux dire l'intérêt éternel de leur âme." Probably, though not certainly, Prévost

taking "philosophe" in the eighteenth-century sense. To his mention of Prévost's belief in miracles and prophetic dreams, M. France might well have added his naïve confidence in the "paquets du Sieur Arnould" as an infallible means, not simply of curing, but of warding off in advance, attacks of apoplexy, and his evident pleasure in returning to the subject and in defending it against attacks<sup>1</sup>. Prévost's was a spirit to which religion would appeal much as it did to Rousseau's, and it was hardly probable that rationalistic attacks would have a considerable effect upon his beliefs, though doubtless they would still further encourage his natural tendency toward toleration. To be dogmatic was foreign to his character. In the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*<sup>2</sup>, after speaking of the political liberty which the English enjoy, he continues: "La religion n'y est pas moins libre. Les Anglois ont reconnu que la contrainte est un attentat contre l'esprit de l'évangile. Ils savent que le cœur des hommes est le domaine de Dieu; que la violence ne produit que des changements extérieurs; qu'un culte forcé est un culte sacrilège qui perd celui qui l'exige et celui qui le rend. . . Je suis. . . ce que je crois devoir être en matière de religion. Ce n'est ni le nom de catholique ni le nom de protestant qui me détermine, c'est la connaissance de la vérité que je crois avoir acquise il y a longtemps par la faveur du ciel et par mes réflexions<sup>3</sup>. " This is indeed the attitude of a man of intelligent and liberal spirit, but is not necessarily in contradiction with his seeming detestation of the deists.

Our information as to Prévost's stay in England is slight indeed. We are perhaps justified in concluding from the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* that he left France from

was sincere in this passage. But note that from the first number of the *Pour et Contre* the censor cut "ce qui concerne les affaires ecclésiastiques" (cf. *infra*, p. 23). This makes Prévost's position again doubtful, cf. *infra*, p. 40.

1. PC., VII, 308-42; X, 435-44.

2. *Œuvres*, II, 393.

3. *Id.*, p. 393 and p. 395.

Calais and crossed to Dover; that thence he proceeded by land to Gravesend, where he embarked on the Thames and landed at the foot of the Tower in London<sup>1</sup>. His apartment, like that of his hero, was perhaps in Suffolk Street<sup>2</sup>. No doubt he shortly found his way into the coffee houses, especially the Rainbow, where, as Sayous notes<sup>3</sup> in connection with Voltaire, French refugees had long been accustomed to gather. There Prévost, always a polite and pleasant companion, as Rousseau among others later noted<sup>4</sup>, could not fail to find at once friends ready to guide him in his first efforts to learn the language and the literature. Sayous refers to a supposed dispute between Voltaire and the Abbé Prévost, in regard to money due the former from certain subscriptions to the *Henriade*<sup>5</sup>. The whole affair has to do with another Prévost, a London bookseller. In fact it dates from March 1728<sup>6</sup>, and the Abbé, as we already know, did not arrive in England till November of the same year. Probably it was through friends made at the Rainbow that Prévost obtained a position as tutor to the son of an English nobleman. He no doubt had need of money, then as all his life. This nobleman, given in the *Mémoires du chevalier de Ravanne* simply as the "chevalier Ey . . .", is perhaps, as Harrissee suggests, Sir Robert Eyre, knighted in 1710, who died in 1733 leaving three sons<sup>7</sup>. With him, the same memoirs testify, Prévost enjoyed "tous les agrémens possibles"<sup>8</sup>. Thanks to this titled acquaintance he was able, according to his letter to Dom Clément de la Rue from The Hague, November 10, 1731, to move in "les meilleures compagnies de Londres"<sup>9</sup>. It is at this same time that he began

1. *Œuvres*, II, pp. 244-45.

2. *Id.*, p. 246.

3. Sayous, *le Dix-huitième siècle à l'étranger*, I, p. 24.

4. *Œuvres de Rousseau*, Hachette, 1862, Vol. V, p. 378 (*Confessions*).

5. Sayous, Vol. I, p. 21, note 1.

6. Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79.

7. Harrissee, p. 143, note 1.

8. *Id.*, p. 143.

9. *Id.*, p. 161.



to go to the theater, for Mrs. Oldfield, whose acting charmed him so much, died in 1730.

Some time during this first stay in England Prévost made an extended trip through the southern part of the island, for of it he gives an account in the continuation of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, which appeared in 1731. It is not at all improbable that it was a journey taken in the company of his youthful charge. In fact it is unlikely, in spite of the recent sale of the first four volumes of his novel, that the Abbé would have been able otherwise to afford it. It seems most reasonable to conclude that in this case he is largely autobiographical. Certainly as an agreeable Mentor, enjoying himself well at Tunbridge and at Bath, present at masquerades, mingling at dances, and well received and entertained everywhere, Prévost would have been very much in character. His account gives the impression of dealing with things seen and not of being a mere compilation from a guide-book, but the descriptions lack color and visual detail. It is too early in the century, however, to expect this to be otherwise. Prévost's route took him from Tunbridge down to the south coast, where, to mention only the principal places, he visited Hastings, Portsmouth, Southampton, Plymouth<sup>1</sup>, the tin and copper mines of Cornwall, then turned north to Bristol, Bath, Oxford, Windsor, and back to London. Later he mentions passing through Canterbury. Thus he has made a circuit which takes him through all the southern part of England, but, with the exception of the detour to visit Oxford, has apparently not gone north of London at all<sup>2</sup>.

Prévost's opinion of the English character, as he expressed it in the *Mémoires* at various times, was in the main very favorable. Perhaps M. Schröder has tended to give a somewhat erroneous impression, however, by placing in his text one of

1. At Stanehouse, near Plymouth, he found a colony of poor French refugees supported in comparative comfort by the generosity of an English nobleman named Hedgecombe. *Œuvres*, II, 367-68.

2. *Id.*, 244-391.



the most enthusiastic passages and by relegating to the notes the following saner and more balanced judgment : " Il n'y a point de pays où l'on trouve tant de droiture, tant d'humanité, des idées si justes d'honneur, de sagesse et de félicité que parmi les Anglois. L'amour du bien public, le goût des sciences solides, l'horreur de l'esclavage et de la flatterie sont des vertus presque naturelles à ces peuples heureux ; elles passent de père en fils comme un héritage. Mais il ne faut chercher les Anglois dont je parle, ni parmi la populace, qui est trop grossière et trop féroce en Angleterre pour être capable de ces grands sentiments, ni parmi la jeunesse, qui y est d'ordinaire extrêmement libertine. Ce n'est que dans un certain âge, et dans une certaine élévation au-dessus du commun, qu'on aperçoit le vrai caractère des Anglois : si vous les regardez dans ce point de vue, j'ose vous répondre que plus vous viendrez à les connoître, plus vous vous accoutumerez à les estimer comme un des premiers peuples de l'univers <sup>1</sup>. " As he has begun with this passage, Prévost can later take it for granted and, if he seems to speak with unreserved enthusiasm, he has in mind only the Englishmen who belong to the very limited class defined above. It appears then that Prévost has seen and judged accurately without over-enthusiasm. As for Montesquieu, praised as having seen through the mask and judged England with so much greater penetration than either Voltaire or Prévost <sup>2</sup>, it is not out of place to make the observation that it is no less a lack of insight to see only the dark side and to find nothing worthy of praise, than it is possibly to err somewhat on the side of charity and enthusiasm.

On the literary side, what new conditions would Prévost meet, fresh from France, where, the memory of the " grand siècle " still largely dominant, the new century had not yet found its way? The age of Dryden was past, though his influence was not. The new age was one of gradually in-

1. *Œuvres*, II, 258-59. Cf. Schröder, pp. 41-42, and p. 40, note 1.

2. *Id.*, pp. 45-46.

creasing freedom and independence for literary men. No longer must they rely entirely upon the pensions accorded by noblemen in return for flattery. Pope, as Beljame has shown <sup>1</sup>, was the first really independent man of letters making his living wholly by the receipts from the sale of his books. Dryden before him had been obliged to seek pensions; Addison, the next author of first rank, had been rewarded by a post under the government, as other authors of his time had also been — or if not, then, like Swift, had sought to be; but Pope refused all aids and relied solely on his pen: he alone forecasts the modern age. It is worth while to recall that Prévost likewise, when he returned to France, supported himself by his writing. His position with the Prince de Conti paid him, unlike some other sinecures of the time and since, nothing.

It was in England a period of increasing morality in literature. The wild licence of the Restoration drama — essentially a court drama — had taken little hold upon the people. Objectors had been found to its immorality even before Jeremy Collier, relying for his arguments upon the critic Rymer, pressed home the attack in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). The violence and fierceness of his warfare were equal to the greatness of the evil and were so effective as to force *amende honorable* even from the aged Dryden, the literary lord of his age <sup>2</sup>. It is doubtful, nevertheless, whether Collier would have had any such effect, out of all proportion to his intrinsic merits, if the people as a whole had not supported the reform. As a matter of fact the bloodless revolution of 1688 had brought new liberty, not only in politics, but also in literature. Newspapers were beginning to be published and read. With the next

1. Beljame, *Le public et les hommes de lettres en Angleterre*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. 1897.

2. But "the plays denounced by Collier continued to hold the stage, though more or less expurgated, throughout the century. Comedy did not become decent." Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 62. Cf. later the constant criticisms of Prévost regarding the indecencies of English comedy.

century came the periodicals of Addison and Steele, and these meant a wider reading public and worked also toward the reform of manners. Steele and later Lillo<sup>1</sup> popularized a moralizing element in the drama, which, though not of the highest literary merit, is most significant and is to be reckoned with. Richardson in the novel is part of the same movement, and Prevost, we recall, is the translator of Richardson. The new age was a people's age and took itself seriously. As such it was an age particularly of literary criticism<sup>2</sup>. The new public was anxious to be taught the way it should go in things literary.

The period of classicism in English literature by no means began with the return of the cavaliers under Charles II<sup>3</sup>. Contemporary with Shakespear, the romantic, had been Ben Jonson, the classicist, and, in his quality of literary dictator, he had formed a school. The Restoration had but strengthened a tendency which, for the simple reason that genius to support the other side was lacking, had already become dominant. It is during this period that Dryden's becomes the prevailing voice in criticism. He belongs, not to any particular school, but to all<sup>4</sup>. His tendency is, now classic, now romantic, but usually he is a large free spirit, erring and changing often in the application of his principles to individual cases, but inclined generally to be open-minded and appreciative, a worthy father of later schools. Contemporary with him was Thomas Rymer, whom Macaulay and Professor Saintsbury have called "the worst critic that ever lived"<sup>5</sup>, but who was none the less in his time a mighty force, inspiring the method of Collier's attacks and lending Voltaire, "not only the startling vocabulary of abuse but the critical method with which the

1. In *George Barnwell or the London Merchant*, 1731.

2. Paul Hamelius, *Die Kritik in der englischen Literatur des siebenzehnten und achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 69.

3. *Id.*, p. 184.

4. *Id.*, p. 63.

5. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. I, Introd., p. LXXX.

great Frenchman attacked Shakespear <sup>1</sup>. " Pope admired him, though he admired Shakespear too, whom Rymer attacked. The reason for this seeming anomaly is that under classicism a man's position as a critic depended, not on his individual dicta, but on his general principles and doctrine<sup>2</sup>. Rymer's criticism by precept and rule was fought by Saint-Evremond, who urged criticism by comparison<sup>3</sup>. Saint-Evremond and Fontenelle were at the end of the seventeenth century the chief exponents of the theory of the influence of climate upon literary canons of taste — an idea which was as old as Aristotle's time, but which had languished. Now it came to the fore and became gradually a reiterated slogan in the eighteenth century, after being taken up by the Abbé Du Bos and (thirty years later) by Montesquieu<sup>4</sup>. From Saint-Evremond. Dryden got his interest in the theory, and not only Dryden, but also John Dennis<sup>5</sup>, who in the early years of the eighteenth century was so important as to be called "*the critic*"<sup>6</sup>. His preface to the *Impartial Critick* has been called "perhaps the best of the expositions of the effects of climate on the literary temper of a race; a hint from Saint-Evremond has furnished him with a suggestive explanation for the differences between Greek and English tragedy<sup>7</sup>". Dennis stood to his age "as the champion of emotion as the basis of poetry, as an advocate of the exaltation and inspiration of the poet that so ill accorded with the prevailing spirit of the times that he was derisively dubbed 'Sir Longinus'<sup>8</sup>". Dennis in fact undertook against Rymer to

1. Spingarn, p. LXXVIII.

2. *Id.*, p. LXXX.

3. *Id.*, pp. LXV-VI.

4. Brunetière, *l'Evolution des genres*, Vol. I, pp. 144-45. Cf. Alfred Lombard, *l'Abbé Du Bos, un initiateur de la pensée moderne*, p. 89.

5. Spingarn, *op. cit.*, p. CII.

6. "[Dennis'] reputation would have gained rather than lost, had he published nothing during his last fifteen years." H. G. Paul, *John Dennis*, 1911, p. 113.

7. Spingarn, p. CII.

8. Paul, p. 134.

prove that Shakespear was a "great genius". Sir William Temple likewise with his broad interests did much to encourage a more liberal conception of literature as a growth depending much upon the conditions under which it is produced<sup>2</sup>.

The gradual result of these liberalizing influences was to produce at the end of the seventeenth century what Professor Spingarn calls the "school of taste," which represents an advance from "a general and abstract treatment to the consideration of particular passages and details, from the criticism of 'faults' to that of 'beauties,' from the concept of reason to that of sentiment and taste<sup>3</sup>." Méré in France, with his insistence upon the supremacy of heart over mind in literary judgments, had championed it<sup>4</sup>; Bouhours and La Bruyère had adopted it, but only in a rationalized form which gave the primacy to reason after all<sup>5</sup> and invoked the same "bon sens" as Boileau. But in England at any rate the tendency found more favorable soil. There Saint-Evremond supported it with all his great influence<sup>6</sup>. Later Shaftesbury came to the fore as a representative of the same school<sup>7</sup>.

The new attitude is reflected in the more liberal treatment of Shakespear by minor critics like Rowe and Gildon. In 1709-1710 the former published the first edition of Shakespear intended for general circulation, and in the first volume printed an Essay on the Life of William Shakespear. He definitely takes a stand against Rymer and shows real appreciation of the poet's genius. Gildon had two essays which were published in the same collection of Shakespear's works. The first is called *An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England*, and the second, *Remarks on the*

1. Paul, p. 63.

2. *Id.*, p. 125.

3. Spingarn, p. cv.

4. Paul, p. 124.

5. Spingarn, p. xcviil.

6. *Id.*, p. xcviil.

7. *Id.*, p. cv.



Plays of Shakespear. Both of these also show appreciation of the English dramatist and sincere admiration for his "witchery," as Gildon expresses it, but he is much more hampered by the rules than Rowe and more occupied with blaming "faults." He is only partly free from the Rymer attitude.

Such were the tendencies in the air toward the end of the old century and the beginning of the new. It must not be imagined that the various movements were very distinctly separated nor that their adherents were necessarily conscious of the direction in which they were going. Gradually the different schools tended, as always, to come together into two<sup>1</sup> which correspond to the two ever existent types of mind, the romantic and the classic.

It was at this time that Addison came into prominence. Addison "vit — ce que ses prédécesseurs avaient seulement entrevu — que le journal littéraire avait un rôle spécial à jouer et une influence nouvelle à exercer sur la société qui l'environnait<sup>2</sup>." It is in this sense that we may say with Beljame: "Addison a inauguré . . . la critique littéraire<sup>3</sup>." He gathered up the leading tendencies of his age and gave them wide circulation among an average reading public unknown to Dryden and his contemporaries. Mr. Saudé notes that the circulation of the *Spectator* went as high as 14,000 copies a day<sup>4</sup>. Addison recognized the rights of the "natural genius," not merely to be tolerated occasionally as the exception, but to be admitted alongside of the "genius formed by rules." He popularized Milton<sup>5</sup>; along with Steele he led an active propaganda in favor of Shakespear, who it is true had, as Hettner has recalled<sup>6</sup> and Mr. Hamelius likewise<sup>7</sup>, not

1. Hamelius, p. 70.

2. Beljame, p. 278.

3. *Id.*, p. 311.

4. Emile Saudé, *Die Grundlagen der literarischen Kritik bei Joseph Addison*, p. 62.

5. Charlanne, *l'Influence française en Angleterre*, p. 566. Dennis had appreciated Milton before Addison, but his influence was less.

6. Hettner, Vol. I, p. 75.

7. Hamelius, p. 111.



been forgotten under the reign of Charles II, but who had suffered many perversions and inexcusable "adaptations"<sup>1</sup>, "Othello and Hamlet being almost the only plays which escaped"<sup>2</sup>. So Addison did valuable service here. He also turned the eyes of his contemporaries toward medieval ballads, thus forecasting Percy and Scott<sup>3</sup>. A noteworthy sign of one sort of liberality is the mention of a girl who with "a natural sense" is "a better judge than a thousand critics"<sup>4</sup>. In fragmentary fashion he popularized the historical viewpoint in literary criticism<sup>5</sup> and used at times the comparative method<sup>6</sup>, which had been advocated as early as Bacon and more recently by Saint-Evremond<sup>7</sup>.

Addison's success produced a great many papers and periodicals, more or less closely imitating the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. At the time when Prévost came to England, there were many of these journals in circulation and the number was rapidly increasing. "Ils sont tellement à la mode," says Prévost, "que le nombre en augmente tous les jours"<sup>8</sup>, but he thinks that, having multiplied so rapidly, they cannot fail soon to decline<sup>9</sup>. He even gives a brief sketch of the origin and development of English journalism, according naturally a place of special importance to the productions of Steele and Addison<sup>10</sup>. Among those periodicals treated with some detail in the *Pour et Contre* are the *Grubstreet Journal*, the *London Tatler*, the *Universal Spectator*, the *Bee*, the *Weekly Miscellany*, and the *Auditor*; many others are mentioned only,

1. Charlanne, pp. 568-72.

2. *Id.*, pp. 570-71.

3. Saudé, p. 63.

4. *Id.*, p. 11. Cf. Musset, "Après une lecture," *Poésies nouvelles* :

Et, que tous les pédants frappent leur tête creuse,

Vive le mélodrame où Margot a pleuré !

5. Hamelius, p. 93.

6. Saudé, p. 14.

7. See *supra*, p. 14.

8. PC., I, 68.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. PC., XIX, pp. 297-300.

such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>1</sup>, the *Craftsman*<sup>2</sup>, etc. Prévost was obviously impressed by the number and variety of these publications in England as compared with France, and it was most natural that it should occur to him to found something of a similar nature in his own country. His respect for Addison and Steele as journalists is obvious<sup>3</sup>; it was a magazine of the better sort that he wished to found, giving, like them, particular attention to things literary. Of this more will be said later. Here it is sufficient to note that one of the most important results of Prévost's English sojourn was the idea of producing a literary magazine such as the *Pour et Contre*.

The time of Prévost's arrival in England was especially favorable. The classic tendency had been aided by the introduction of French influence after the Restoration. In the end, though not immediately, this influence was beneficial. The English genius had need of pruning from Elizabethan youthful freedom. Moreover, the very deformation in part of English literary taste was necessary in order to make possible the entry in turn of English influence into France and in order to make there effective the vivifying tendency of English romanticism. In this wise, through France as intermediary, English literature was able to become European. The age of Pope made it possible ultimately, and perhaps sooner than otherwise would have been the case, to know in France the age of Shakespear also.

Prévost's English journeys came when the so-called Augustan period was nearing its close. Addison had died in 1719. Steele died in 1729, the same year as Congreve; Defoe in 1731; the critic, John Dennis, in 1734. Pope (1688-1744) and Swift (1667-1745) reigned supreme. Yet all of Pope's

1. Several times mentioned and quoted later, however.

2. One whole number translated later, but of a political, not of a literary, character. These references occur: PC., I, pp. 44-46, 33, and 258.

3. PC., I, pp. 69-70.

important work had been published, except the *Essay on Man*, and that came out anonymously before Prévost's return to France, three epistles in 1732-33 and a fourth in 1734. Swift's *Tale of a Tub* had appeared in 1704 and *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726. Thus his important work was done and, though he lived fifteen years thereafter, old age and sickness were heavy upon him. *Robinson Crusoe* had appeared in 1719<sup>1</sup>, Defoe's other novels during the twenties. In this connection it should be noted that Prévost makes no mention of Defoe nor of his work, either in the *Pour et Contre* or, as far as I have been able to discover, anywhere else. The fact that *Robinson Crusoe* was known in France from the time of its translation in 1720 is no explanation, since Prévost talked of other works which were generally known, the *Spectator* for instance. Given his keen taste for voyages, real or imaginary, there is no work which one would more readily expect to find him mentioning frequently and favorably. But, compared with Addison, Steele, Swift, and Pope, Defoe was socially only a poor scribbler, widely popular with the general reader but looked down upon by the aristocrats of letters. It may be that in this fact we find the reason for Prévost's neglect. In any case it seems that one must hesitate before concluding that Defoe influenced the French novelist, as M. Schröder<sup>2</sup> and Mr. F. B. Bury<sup>3</sup> have thought. It is quite possible that there was such influence. It is probable enough that Prévost knew in England the translator of *Robinson Crusoe*, Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, but as yet we have no definite indication on which to base any positive conclusions.

The chief literary events during the actual period of Prévost's stay in England were: Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, which had a long run in 1728; Pope's *Dunciad*, which appeared the

1. Not "une vingtaine d'années avant l'arrivée de Prévost en Angleterre," as M. Schröder has stated (p. 36, note 1).

2. P. 36.

3. "The Abbé Prévost in England", *Scottish Review*, 1899, p. 38 and p. 49.

same year: Swift's terrible satire which is called *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burden to their Parents or the Country*, in 1729; Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, in 1730; and, in the same year, the founding of the *Grub Street Journal* and the appearance of Thompson's *Seasons*<sup>1</sup>; in 1731, one of Swift's best poems, *On the Death of Dr. Swift*<sup>2</sup>, the appearance of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and Lillo's great success, *George Barnwell or the London Merchant*; finally, in 1733-34, Pope's *Essay on Man*. One notes again with surprise that Thompson's work, the forerunner of romanticism, seems not to have impressed Prévost particularly. In vague and purely conventional fashion he mentions Prior, Addison, Thompson, as authors "qui ne sont inférieurs en rien aux meilleurs poètes de tous les temps" and as "noms chéris des Muses, et admirés de ceux qui connoissent le prix de leurs ouvrages".

M. Schröder states that Prévost left England for The Hague in 1729<sup>3</sup>, but there is some uncertainty about the exact date of his departure, and M. Schröder does not discuss the matter. Harrisse was at first of the opinion that Prévost returned to Holland probably not later than January, 1731<sup>4</sup>, and perhaps as early as December, 1730. In his later work on the *Vie monastique de l'abbé Prévost*, he has altered slightly his conclusions. Prévost's letter of the tenth of November, 1731, to Dom Clément de la Rue contains the following passage: "C'est avec beaucoup de chagrin que je me suis vu privé ici du plaisir de voir Dom Thuillier. Je n'appris son arrivée qu'après son départ, et je suis très alligé d'entendre dire à plusieurs personnes qu'il étoit parti avec l'opinion que

1. *Winter* had been published in March, 1726; *Summer* was composed in 1727, and *Spring* in 1728. *Autumn* and a final *Hymn to Nature* appeared in the edition of 1730.

2. A pirated and incomplete version appeared in 1733, and an authorized copy in 1739. *Cambridge History*, IX, p. 137.

3. *MHQ.*, II, p. 282.

4. Schröder, p. 50.

5. Harrisse, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 151-70.

je l'avois évité à dessein de lui parler et de le voir. Le Ciel m'est témoin que c'eût été pour moi une très vive satisfaction ; et que j'ai fort regretté de l'avoir perdue. Quelle raison aurois-je eu de le fuir ? Je vis, grâces au Ciel, sans reproche. Tel en Hollande qu'à Paris<sup>1</sup>. " The time of Dom Thuillier's journey is important for our purpose. From HARRISSE's further investigations it results that, according to the temporary annalist of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Dom Martine, the journey was made in the fall of 1730. Dom Thuillier left Brussels the eighteenth of September, arrived at Rotterdam on the twentieth, and stayed a week. From there he went on to The Hague where, as HARRISSE thinks, he remained during the first week of October. From Prévost's brief account of his translation of De Thou's history, HARRISSE deduces the time of the Abbé's return from England. The task of the translation was first proposed to him in France, and Prévost continues: " Étant passé ensuite en Angleterre, la même proposition me fut renouvelée presque aussitôt . . . Deux ans s'écoulent, je viens en Hollande et j'y suis à peine arrivé que les propos renaissent<sup>2</sup>. " HARRISSE therefore concludes: " C'est dans la première quinzaine de novembre 1728 que Prévost passa de France en Angleterre. Les deux années qui s'écoulent nous reportent donc à novembre 1730, comme date de sa présence à La Haye. Dom Thuillier en était parti depuis environ trois semaines. De là les regrets très sincères de Prévost<sup>3</sup>. " However, it seems uncertain that Prévost's two years were intended to be taken quite so literally. Three weeks more or less would mean nothing where only approximate accuracy was probably intended. Furthermore, if at the time of Dom Thuillier's presence at The Hague Prévost was not yet back from England, why should the former not have known of the fact ? On the contrary, he evidently believed that Prévost was back on the continent, for he left the city

1. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 162.

2. Cited by HARRISSE, *la Vie monastique de l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 39-40.

3. *Id.*, p. 40.



thinking that the Abbé was intentionally avoiding him. Finally, if Prévost had not been in Holland, he would certainly have said so in his letter to De la Rue, for that fact would have constituted an excuse absolutely satisfactory and convincing, whereas he is able to state only : " Je n'appris son arrivée qu'après son départ. " If Dom Thuillier thought he had reason to doubt Prévost's friendship and complete good faith, — and he evidently did think so, — then this excuse would appear to him much weaker and more doubtful than the other. So it seems reasonable to differ from HARRISSE to the extent of thinking it probable that Prévost was at The Hague during the latter part of September or the first part of October, 1730, but hardly much earlier in view of the two years which Prévost mentions as the duration of his first English visit. Thus his stay in England was of almost exactly the same length as Voltaire's had been <sup>1</sup>. During this first visit he had learned the language, attended the theater and become acquainted with the literature. He had composed *Cléveland* (most of the first four volumes), Volumes V and VI of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, and possibly *Manon Lescaut* <sup>2</sup>. He had toured most of southern England, been well received and made friends with whom he continued to keep in touch after his return <sup>3</sup>. In short it had been a pleasant and active period in his life.

1. Voltaire's visit lasted slightly less than two years, according to M. L. Foulet, who, in the *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France* (1906, p. 19), dates his arrival in England as August 15, 1726, and his return to France as the beginning of August, 1728. According to Mr. Churton Collins (*Voltaire... en Angleterre*, 1911, p. 7 and p. 109), Voltaire arrived in England probably May 30, 1726, and departed March 20 or 23, 1729. Cf. *infra*, p. 106, note 2.

2. This is the opinion of HARRISSE, *Vie monastique*, p. 17. On p. 26 he admits the possibility of the hypothesis that *Manon Lescaut* might have been composed at the Abbey of Saint-Ouen (1722-23), while the memory of the real Manon was freshest in his mind. Cf. my article, " The Date of Composition of *Manon Lescaut*, " *Modern Language Notes*, Vol., XXXIII, pp. 150-54. In the absence of positive proof it seems that the balance of probability leans slightly toward the hypothesis that the masterpiece was composed at Saint-Ouen rather than in the already well-filled English period.

3. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 161.



In January 1733<sup>1</sup>, Prévost made a second journey to England. In the *Pour et Contre* he explains his departure vaguely. "Diverses raisons," he says, "m'ayant porté quelques mois après à quitter La Haye pour repasser en Angleterre<sup>2</sup>." HARRISSE has shown the untruth or malicious exaggeration in the various stories circulated about Prévost's departure "avec une suivante," etc. What part the "demoiselle de mérite et de naissance," as Prévost himself calls her<sup>3</sup>, may have had in his decision to leave Holland we do not know. It is quite probable, however, that reason for his departure may have existed in the debts which he himself acknowledged and which were due to his generosity. "C'est une chose assez connue, que ma fortune a toujours surpassé mes besoins, et que j'avois peu d'embaras à craindre pour moi-même, si j'eusse été moins sensible à ceux d'autrui<sup>4</sup>." Nor for this trait of character are we dependent only upon his own testimony<sup>5</sup>.

Once having arrived in London and with his pressing need of money very much in his mind, Prévost, in whom no doubt the project had been germinating ever since his first visit, set himself almost at once to retrieve his fortune by the publication of the periodical, *Le Pour et Contre*. It was printed in Paris. The opening number was presented by Didot and approved the twenty-fourth of March, 1733, but only after the cutting out of "ce qui concerne les affaires ecclésiastiques." The privilege was of the seventeenth of June, and on the twenty-first the new periodical was mentioned by the *Journal de la Cour et de Paris*<sup>6</sup>. Toward the end of this year 1733, Prévost appealed to the Pope for pardon<sup>7</sup>. According to

1. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 188-90.

2. PC., IV, 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

5. Even his enemy, RAVANNE, on his own testimony never received anything but favors and loans from Prévost. HARRISSE, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

6. HARRISSE, pp. 209-10.

7. *Id.*, p. 221.

Harris's hypothesis, the Abbé returned to France secretly during the summer of 1734<sup>1</sup>. In any case a letter from Marais to Bouhier testifies to his being back in Paris by the eleventh of October with a brief of translation to Cluny. "Sa première visite a été chez madame de Tencin comme de raison<sup>2</sup>."

Thus his second sojourn in England had lasted about a year and a half, from the beginning of 1733 to the middle of 1734. Altogether he had spent three years and a half on the other side of the Channel. His preparation for the task of popularization was excellent<sup>3</sup>.

1. Harris, p. 228.

2. *Id.*, p. 229.

3. It may be interesting to note the most important plays presented during Prévost's residence in England, as given by Genest, Vol. III. Many bills are lacking so that Genest's list is not complete. Gaps might perhaps be filled by reference to the daily papers of the time, but these are not accessible to me.

Macbeth, Tempest, King Lear, Henry IV (Part I and Part II), Julius Caesar, Merry Wives, Measure for Measure, Jew of Venice, Othello. Timon of Athens, Henry VIII, Hamlet, Richard III, Troilus and Cressida, Careless Husband (Cibber), Cato (Addison), All for Love (Dryden), Provoked Wife (Vanbrugh), Silent Woman (Jonson), Volpone (Jonson), Alchemist (Jonson), Country Wife (Wycherley), OEdipus (Dryden and Lee), Old Bachelor (Congreve), Beggar's Opera (Gay), Drummer (Steele), Venice Preserved (Otway), Double Dealer (Congreve), Recruiting Officer (Farquhar), Mourning Bride (Congreve), Provoked Husband (Vanbrugh and Cibber), Constant Couple (Farquhar), Fair Penitent (Rowe), Way of the World (Congreve), Oronooko (Southerne), Jane Shore (Rowe), Tender Husband (Steele; with Mrs. Oldfield), Provoked Wife (with Mrs. Oldfield; her last performance, according to Curll: Genest, III, 259), Conscious Lovers (Steele), Plain Dealer (Wycherley), The London Merchant (Lillo).

The period included is November 11, 1728, to October, 1730, and January 27, 1733, to May 24, 1734.

It is to be noted that among the important tragedies of Shakespear not appearing are Romeo and Juliet, and Antony and Cleopatra (probably supplanted by Dryden's All for Love); among the comedies missing are: Twelfth Night, the Taming of the Shrew, As You Like It, etc. It must not be concluded from the above list that others may not have been given for which the bills are now missing, nor that Prévost saw more than perhaps a relatively small number of those mentioned. Troilus and Cressida may be Dryden's reworking.

## CHAPTER II

PRÉVOST'S GENERAL AIM IN THE *POUR ET CONTRE*

Of his aim in the *Pour et Contre* Prévost writes thus : " Tout ce qui regarde les Lettres appartient à mon projet. Les livres et les auteurs en seront toujours la partie la plus noble ; mais je n'en exclus pas même les imprimeurs et les libraires <sup>1</sup>. " He outlines more exactly his plan. " Enfin, ce qui sera tout à fait particulier à cette feuille, je promets d'y insérer chaque fois quelque particularité intéressante touchant le génie des Anglois, les curiositez de Londres et des autres parties de l'isle, les progrès qu'on y fait tous les jours dans les sciences et les arts, et de traduire même quelquefois les plus belles scènes de leurs pièces de théâtre<sup>2</sup>. "

The public interest in things English had been increasing gradually since the beginning of the century. Already it was becoming keen, for Prévost counted upon the new publication " pour gagner du pain <sup>3</sup>, " and was not disappointed. Shortly he declared his wish to make particularly interesting " tout ce qui concerne l'état littéraire de l'Angleterre et de l'Allemagne <sup>4</sup>. " But the part devoted to Germany is relatively insignificant. Neither the public taste at this time nor Prévost's own preparation permitted it to be otherwise. To treat English literature, however, he was especially well equipped, and naturally enough wanted his reader to know it. " L'aveu que je vais faire, le préviendra peut-être en faveur de ma sincérité : c'est que sachant la langue angloise, et faisant venir régulièrement de Londres toutes les feuilles périodiques qui sont comprises sous le nom de *News Papers*, je suis résolu pour enrichir la

1. PC., I, 121.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 11.

3. Letter from Marais to President Bouhier, July 11, 1733, cited by Harris, pp. 212-13.

4. PC., I, 217.

mienne, d'en tirer tout ce que je pourrai rendre propre à l'usage de la France<sup>1</sup>. ”

The phrase “ faisant venir régulièrement de Londres ” is surprising, for the reason that it occurs in the very first number of the *Pour et Contre* written, so far as we know, in England during the year 1733. It may mean only that Prévost was at this time in the counties instead of at the capital.

Later the Abbé mentions his “ longue étude de la langue angloise<sup>2</sup> ” and “ la loi que je me suis imposée de ne jamais parler d'un livre qu'après l'avoir lu entièrement<sup>3</sup>. ” When, in the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, the marquis' Mentor says that it was the beauty and charm of voice of the actress, Mrs. Oldfield<sup>4</sup>, which first taught him to like the English drama, and further that he was accustomed before going to the theater to read the play that was to be represented, we have probably the memory of Prévost's own first steps in English literature and the foundation of the knowledge perfected afterwards by long study<sup>5</sup>.

The importance given from the very first to foreign — and chiefly English — literature and manners, was soon vindicated by experience. Prévost wrote : “ J'ai cru d'ailleurs jusqu'à présent que je devois le succès du *Pouret Contre* à ces traits étrangers, qui doivent flatter beaucoup plus la curiosité d'un lecteur françois que ce qui se passe à ses yeux<sup>6</sup>. ” This passage

1. PC., I, 12.

2. *Ibid.*, XVI, 237.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

4. “ Mrs. Oldfield was in person tall, genteel and well shaped ; her countenance was pleasing and expressive, enlivened with large speaking eyes, which in some particular Comic situations, she kept half shut ; especially when she intended to give effect to some brilliant or gay thought : in sprightliness of air and elegance of manner she excelled all actresses, and was greatly superior in the clear, sonorous, and harmonious tones of her voice. ”

John Genest, *History of the Drama and Stage in England from 1660 to 1830*. Vol. III, p. 261. Cf. also Percy Fitzgerald, *A New History of the English Stage*, Vol. II, pp. 35-42.

5. Prévost, *Œuvres*, II, 280.

6. PC., VI, 312.

occurs in Volume VI, written in 1733, after the magazine had already been running two years; and that Prévost was not deceived is shown by the fact that he was able to continue to devote particular attention to things English. The interest of the public was probably often due to no higher motive than curiosity to learn of English "eccentricity." So it was in one case at least. President Bouhier wrote to Marais on the second of March 1734: "J'ai enfin lu le premier volume du *Pour et Contre* qui m'a fort amusé, surtout en ce qu'on lit des extravagances angloises <sup>1</sup>." No matter; the interest was there and did not fail in time to produce results.

It is evident too that, however much he occupied himself often with lighter matters, Prévost regarded the *Pour et Contre* as chiefly a literary journal. In fact he did not fail to speak of it definitely as such. "Mais voici," he says, "quelques observations qui ne s'écartent point du but d'une *feuille littéraire*<sup>2</sup>." This does not indeed mean that there was not much space given to anecdotes and curious details concerning literature and the life of literary men. It was far from being all serious literary criticism. First of all Prévost had to amuse his public. If at the same time he could do more, so much the better.

But Prévost was not unconscious of the fact that England had a literary history as well as France, and that this history was but little known abroad. "L'Angleterre," he says, "dont l'histoire littéraire est peu connue hors de ses limites<sup>3</sup>." This is in marked contrast to the famous and oft-cited documents sent by the Comte de Comminges to Louis XIV fifty years before<sup>4</sup>.

Thus two things are evident. The author of the *Pour et*

1. Cited by Harrisse, p. 221.

2. PC., IX, 122.

3. PC., I, 188.

4. J. M. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, p. 4. Comminges wrote: "Il semble que les arts et les sciences abandonnent quelquefois un pays pour en aller honorer un autre à son tour. Présentement elles ont passé en France et s'il en reste ici quelques vestiges,



*Contre*, though of necessity he aimed first of all to entertain<sup>1</sup>, had as his chief serious intention the publication of book notes and reviews and literary criticism, of which the most distinctive part is of course that which treats of English literature. It is also the part which is still to-day of greatest interest, and with which the present study is concerned.

### CHAPTER III

#### AUTHORSHIP OF THE *POUR ET CONTRE*

Before proceeding to treat Prévost's literary criticism, it is necessary to settle, if possible, a question of the authorship of certain volumes of the *Pour et Contre*, since it is generally known that Prévost did not write them all. M. Schrøder states :

“ Prévost ne rédigea pas son journal sans interruption : dès le second volume, il s'en rapportait à une plume étrangère. Mais le public s'irrita de voir qu'on avait voulu lui donner le change. Prévost reprit son travail à la troisième feuille du troisième volume, et le continua jusqu'au dix-septième. Selon Mathieu Marais (Lettre au Président Bouhier du 9 janvier 1734), il y aurait eu désaccord entre Prévost et Didot. “ Le moine “ renié s'est brouillé avec le libraire de France. ”

“ Lefèvre de Saint-Marc qui lui succéda ne fut point goûté des lecteurs, et Prévost écrivit le dix-neuvième volume pour abandonner ensuite entièrement le journal. Les quatre premiers volumes seulement datent de son séjour à Londres (voir la *Biographie de 1783*)<sup>2</sup>. ”

ce n'est que dans la mémoire de Bacon, de Morus, de Buchanan, et dans les derniers siècles, d'un nommé Miltonius qui s'est rendu plus infâme par ses dangereux écrits que les bourreaux et les assassins de leur Roi,”

1. PC., XI, 230.

2. V. Schrøder, *L'abbé Prévost*, p. 70, note 2.

This statement is evidently based on that of the former biographer just mentioned and with one exception agrees with it entirely. The original reads : " La manière de Lefèvre-de-Saint-Marc, son continuateur, n'étant pas encore goûtée, il [Prévost] reprit le *Pour et Contre* au dix-neuvième pour l'abandonner entièrement *au volume suivant* <sup>1</sup>. " Whatever ambiguity there may be here is settled by a statement of Prévost himself. He says explicitly :

" Je suis parvenu à la fin du vingtième tome de cet ouvrage, où je me suis toujours proposé de borner ma course. D'autres occupations m'ayant forcé de l'interrompre deux fois, j'avertis que la plus grande partie du second tome, et le dix-sept et le dix-huitième entiers, ne sont pas de moi <sup>2</sup>. "

As to just how much is comprised in " la plus grande partie du second tome, " again the author comes to our aid, this time with the following statement from the fifth volume of the *Pour et Contre*. " Ce que j'ai dit de l'auteur obligeant qui a suppléé pendant quelques semaines à mon travail, pourra faire souhaiter à quelqu'un de sçavoir quelles sont les feuilles qui viennent de sa plume. Je les ferai connoître d'autant plus volontiers que je serais fâché qu'on me fit honneur du travail d'autrui. Elles commencent à la dix-neuvième, dont il n'y a que la première partie qui soit de moi. Le reste, à prendre depuis la page 83, est d'une main qui m'est inconnue, et qui a soutenu l'ouvrage jusqu'à la feuille 33, où j'ai pris soin d'avertir que je rentrais dans la carrière <sup>3</sup>. "

With these two statements the matter would seem to be entirely settled, but it appears that one whole number of Volume XIX was not by Prévost but by the same author as the greater part of XVII and XVIII. From two passages it is clear also that the first number of Volume XVII was by Prévost himself.

" Le continuateur de cet ouvrage qui étoit entré dans la

1. *Œuvres de Prévost*, Introd., Vol. I, p. 24.

2. PC., XX, 335.

3. *Ibid.*, V, 24.

carrière par la seconde feuille du tome dix-septième, s'est trouvé obligé, par d'autres occupations, d'abandonner son entreprise en finissant le tome XVIII. Cependant comme il restoit cette feuille de lui entre les mains du libraire, on n'a pas laissé de l'insérer ici ; celui qui lui succède promet plus de variété, et tiendra d'autant mieux parole qu'il sait l'Anglois, et quelques autres langues, comme le premier auteur <sup>1</sup>. "

The other passage is as follows : " On s'est figuré, par exemple, que le détail qui regarde M. de Tréville au XIV. livre de Cléveland ne porte sur rien de réel. Voici la source où je l'ai puisé <sup>2</sup>. "

The reference above to the " premier auteur," taken together with the following, might well add to the confusion. We read : " Quand l'ancienne méthode du *Pour et Contre* n'auroit point eu d'autre avantage que celui de nous faire connoître assez régulièrement ce qui se passe chez nos voisins, je m'applaudirois de l'avoir rétablie, et de m'être mis en état de rendre le même service à la France <sup>3</sup>. "

A little later comes this passage : " J'entre avec tant de soin dans la méthode du premier auteur de cet ouvrage, que ceux qui l'ont goûtée n'auront pas de peine à la reconnoître <sup>4</sup>. "

There is room here for confusion, but these statements hardly constitute a sufficient ground for rejecting the positive assertion (cited *supra*, page 29) that the author of Volumes XIX and XX was the same as the author of Volumes I and III-XVI, that is to say, Prévost himself. Rather the above passages seem to be due only to a desire to preserve for a time a quasi-anonymity, perhaps merely for the pleasure of seeing the public recognize from the improvement in form and content that the first author had resumed the editorship. The last pas-

1. PC., XIX, 48. HARRISSE in quoting this passage read it incorrectly " la seconde feuille du tome XVIII." instead of " dix-septième," as it should be. HARRISSE, page 296. This has led him into another slight misstatement regarding the authorship. See *infra*.

2. *Ibid.*, XVII, 10. Cf. also pp. 11, 13, 16, 23-24.

3. *Ibid.*, XIX, 121-22. Note the discreet self-praise.

4. *Ibid.*, XIX, 145.

sage cited points somewhat to this interpretation. It is also borne out by Prévost's statement after the former interruption, when he was returning to the editorship in Volume III. He speaks of the "facilité avec laquelle j'apprens que le public a reconnu, que les dernières feuilles du *Pour et Contre* sont d'une autre main que la mienne<sup>1</sup>." A more substantial reason may lie in the fact that in 1739-40 Prévost was extremely embarrassed financially and being pursued by his creditors. He may well have been glad to try to preserve his anonymity as long as possible. His situation did in fact become so desperate that he was driven to seek the aid of Voltaire, which, in spite of the latter's previous warm protestations of friendship<sup>2</sup>, Prévost did not obtain<sup>3</sup>.

From the above argument, then, it results that Prévost was the author of the greater part of the *Pour et Contre*, but that he did not write the following: Volume II, p. 83 to end, and Volume III, pp. 1-48; Volume XVII, p. 23 to end, and Volume XVIII; Volume XIX, pp. 23-48.

The first gap (Volumes II-III) was bridged over by the Abbé Desfontaines. Marais wrote to President Bouhier, January 9, 1734: "Il y a une anecdote sur le *Pour et Contre*. Le moine renié [Prévost] s'est brouillé avec le libraire de France [François Didot]. Ce temps a été rempli par l'abbé Desfon-

1. PC., III, 30.

2. See Voltaire's Correspondence, March 4 and 20, 1736, August 4 and November 27, 1738.

3. Prévost wrote to Voltaire, January 15, 1740, describing his unhappy situation. "Le dérangement de mes affaires est tel que, si le ciel, ou quelqu'un inspiré de lui, n'y met ordre, je suis à la veille de repasser en Angleterre. Je ne m'en plaindrais pas si c'était ma faute; mais depuis cinq ans que je suis en France, avec autant d'amis qu'il y a d'honnêtes gens à Paris, avec la protection d'un prince du sang qui me loge dans son hôtel, je suis encore sans un bénéfice de cinq sous. Je dois environ cinquante louis, pour lesquels mes créanciers réunis m'ont fait assigner, etc.; et le cas est si pressant qu'étant convenu avec eux d'un terme qui expire le premier du mois prochain, je suis menacé d'un décret de prise de corps si je ne les satisfais pas dans ce temps." Voltaire's Correspondence, Jan. 15, 1740. Voltaire evidently did not class himself among the "inspirés du ciel," for he politely refused the request.

taines<sup>1</sup>. " The second change, as we have already seen<sup>2</sup>, put the editorship into the hands of Lefèvre de Saint-Marc. From the misreading " XVIII<sup>e</sup> " for " dix-septième " (the second numeral is written out in the *Pour et Contre* passage, thus making its correctness conclusive), and from the fact that the title page of Volume XVIII bore the initials M. D. S. M. (M. de Saint-Marc), while Volume XVII did not, Harri-  
 se concluded that only XVIII was by Saint-Marc and that XVII was by some other person of unknown name<sup>3</sup>. There no longer appears any reason for this theory.

It has been necessary to go into this question in some detail, not merely to establish for the purposes of this study the parts of the *Pour et Contre* really written by Prévost, but also because the weight of his name has been incorrectly attached to some of the criticism of Lefèvre de Saint-Marc<sup>4</sup>, an honor which the latter not only would have been, but actually was, the first to disclaim<sup>5</sup>.

1. Cited by Harri-  
 se, p. 216.

2. See *supra*, p. 28.

3. Harri-  
 se, p. 296.

4. C. F. Zeek, Jr., *Louis de Boissy*, Grenoble, 1914, p. 209, cites Prévost, *Pour et Contre*, XVIII, p. 25, apropos of Boissy's *les Talents à la mode*. This, as we have seen, is one of the parts of the periodical composed not by Prévost but by Saint-Marc.

5. PC., XVII, 97-99. " Je ne sais quelle espèce de remerciement je dois à ceux qui prétendent que les deux dernières feuilles du *Pour et Contre* sont de la même main que les autres. On ne pouvoit pas faire un éloge plus flatteur de ma manière d'écrire, que de la confondre avec celle de mon prédécesseur. Mais je sais me rendre justice ; et bien que cette erreur me soit honorable, je n'ai garde de la laisser subsister. Un manque d'attention l'a produite ; un peu de réflexion la détruiroit bientôt ; et je craindrois qu'on ne finit par m'accuser d'avoir eu dessein d'en imposer en public. Je me hâte donc de le dire ; je n'ai point eu la ridicule intention de faire croire que le *Pour et Contre* étoit toujours du même auteur. Beaucoup de ses lecteurs se sont d'abord aperçus de la différence, et sans doute à mon désavantage. Je sens moi-même combien cet ouvrage doit perdre entre mes mains.

" Je n'ai point cette imagination vive, étendue, féconde, qui saisissant fortement ce qu'elle voit, en représente au vrai tous les traits, et toujours avec le coloris de la nature. Je n'ai point ce stile énergique, animé, nerveux, qui sait prendre toutes sortes de formes, et donner aux pensées, aux sentimens, aux images un tour vraiment original, et toujours sûr de plaire. Je n'ai point ce riche amas de connoissances de tout



## CHAPTER IV

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF PRÉVOST'S CRITICISM

In his thesis on Marivaux, G. Larroumet speaks of Prévost's literary criticism in these terms : " Sauf l'abbé Prévost, généralement judicieux, impartial, et assez large, la critique est très médiocrement représentée jusqu'aux environs de 1750. Desfontaines, Boindin, Clément, etc. étaient de médiocres censeurs et de pauvres caractères, plus gazetiers que littérateurs. Les critiques de ce nom n'apparaissent que dans la seconde moitié du siècle, où d'Alembert, Grimm, La Harpe, Chamfort, Marmontel relevent une profession avilie <sup>1</sup>. "

It is in the very first number of the *Pour et Contre* that Prévost announces his policy of fairness : " Si je parle d'un ouvrage d'esprit, je tâcherai d'en faire l'éloge avec la même sincérité que la critique <sup>2</sup>. " We shall have occasion later to see whether he tries really to live up to this program, or

genre, cette heureuse et fidèle mémoire, cette facilité prodigieuse, qui suffisent à tout, et qui par le mélange judicieux de l'agréable et de l'utile, produisent cette amusante et solide variété, qui fait autant d'honneur à l'écrivain, que de plaisir à ses lecteurs. Enfin, je ne connois rien en moi de ce qui porte les ouvrages de *M. l'Abbé Prévôt* à ce degré d'excellence, qu'il est plus aisé d'admirer, que d'atteindre. Et cependant je me charge de continuer ce qu'il abandonne. Que mon entreprise est téméraire ! Elle l'est d'autant plus qu'il est le seul écrivain périodique, auquel mon amour propre m'avouoit incapable de succéder. Ce n'est pas que je prétende rien dérober à la gloire des autres. Je veux dire uniquement que leur genre de travail convient mieux à ma sorte d'esprit, à mes faibles talents, aux études que j'ai faites. C'est pour cela même que j'ai commencé par en rapprocher le *Pour et Contre*."

A most interesting attitude toward Prévost which can be interpreted neither as sarcasm nor as due to a professional pose of modesty. Such depreciation of one's own abilities is possible only when the popularity of one's predecessor is really so great that it would be more dangerous not to acknowledge frankly his superiority. The necessity Prévost was in of taking up once more the editorship showed the truth of Saint-Marc's praise.

1. G. Larroumet, *Marivaux*, p. 451.

2. PC, I, 8.

whether it is merely one of those meaningless statements thrown out so often with greater or less sincerity by critics who are far from following them in their actual criticism. Prévost declares himself in zealous opposition to all false taste : “ Je m’élève avec zèle contre les abus du bel esprit, et je prends le parti de la vérité et de la droite raison, contre le faux goût et contre l’ignorance <sup>1</sup>. ”

This earnestness of purpose comes, it may be, from contact with English critics. No doubt at any rate that it was affected by them, for of the value of their work Prévost speaks as follows : “ Il faut leur rendre là-dessus toute la justice qu’ils méritent. Le bon goût <sup>2</sup> s’est répandu parmi eux à force de faire la guerre à tout ce qui le blesse. Point de quartier pour le plat et pour le ridicule. Les impitoyables critiques que les Anglois ! A peine un ouvrage voit-il le jour à Londres, qu’il devient comme la proie d’une infinité de plumes, qui n’attendoient que le moment de sa naissance. On ne l’épargne pas, soit religieux ou profane : il faut qu’il soit connu pour ce qu’il est, si c’est un sot ouvrage. Ils donnent pour raison, qu’il n’y a que cette manière d’extirper peu à peu les mauvais auteurs. Si l’on se contente de les laisser dans l’oubli où ils tombent d’eux-mêmes, une mort si douce les rend plus hardis. Il faut des exemples éclatans, disent-ils, sans quoi l’impunité augmente le nombre. Par cette rigoureuse méthode, combien de productions infortunées périssent tous les jours dès le berceau <sup>3</sup> ! ”

While approving the purpose of the English critics, Prévost does not care to imitate the violence of their criticisms which has caused the office of critic to be likened to that of the “ bourreau <sup>4</sup>. ” On the contrary, he mentions “ le tour civil dont je tâche de revêtir ma critique ou mes éloges <sup>5</sup>, ” “ la

1. PC., III, 444.

2. Note that he gives the English credit for having good taste ; this in itself is a new attitude to most Frenchmen of the period, and later.

3. PC., I, 35.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 350, note (a).

5. *Ibid.*, XIII, 467.

sincérité de ses louanges du *Pour et Contre* et la modération de sa critique <sup>1</sup>. " " J'évite, " he says, " autant qu'il m'est possible toutes sortes d'applications offénçantes <sup>2</sup>. " Another passage reads : " Ceux qui m'ont fait l'honneur de lire jusqu'à présent mes petites productions, sçavent que le caractère de mon stile n'est point l'aigreur et la satire <sup>3</sup> ... J'ai respecté ma patrie. J'ai rendu justice au mérite et à la vertu. C'est une disposition dont je fais gloire, et je veux qu'il en paroisse quelque chose, à l'égard même de mes ennemis <sup>4</sup>. " "

Although the very title *Le Pour et Contre* obligated him to treat both sides of every question, and though by this method he hoped — vainly enough of course — to offend no one <sup>5</sup>, yet Prévost is far from falling into the " littleness of this patchy, yea-nay criticism " inveighed against by Saintsbury <sup>6</sup>. " Je crois pouvoir me flater que les lecteurs sans prévention auront remarqué aisément dans mes feuilles une envie constante de faire valoir le bon des ouvrages dont je parle, plutôt que des efforts pour y faire découvrir des défauts <sup>7</sup>. " There is a desire also to get beneath the surface and appreciate an author's merit justly without being blinded by his faults. " La critique la plus difficile n'est pas celle qui fait distinguer le bien du mal ou le bon écrivain du mauvais. Il y a un discerne-

1. PC., VI, 83.

2. *Ibid.*, IV, 209.

3. In PC., II, 143, while Prévost was not the editor, appeared this criticism of Bruys' *Histoire des Papes*: " C'est le livre le plus insensé qui soit jamais sorti de la plume d'un mauvais auteur. " Marais wrote to Bouhier : " Vous sentez bien, Monsieur, que ce n'est pas là de l'ex-bénédictin et que cela est digne de l'abbé Desfontaines. " Cited by HARRISSE, p. 218. Thus even Prévost's enemies acknowledged the truth of his own characterization of his style.

4. PC., IV, 33-34.

5. " Cette manière de traiter mes sujets, comme autant de problèmes dont j'abandonnerai toujours la décision au lecteur, me paraît si propre à satisfaire tout le monde, que j'ose me promettre de ne déplaire à personne. " PC., I, 9. Cf. also PC., VII, 4, note (a), cited *infra*. Prévost has seen the impracticability of his method.

6. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, Vol. II, p. 454.

7. PC., XV, 200. Cf. *supra*, p. 13, the school taste in England.

ment plus délicat qui consiste à déterminer les différens degrez du bien, et qui mesure moins le mérite par la distance où il est du mauvais ou du médiocre, que par les heureux traits qui le font approcher plus ou moins de la perfection <sup>1</sup>. " It is this cast of mind which will make Prévost's judgments of English literature fairer in general than those of Voltaire.

Prévost feels too the importance of literary criticism as a part of the journalist's duty. For him it is already almost a real genre apart <sup>2</sup>. " Il s'est trouvé des journalistes qui ont promis au public de ne prendre aucun parti sur le mérite des ouvrages, et d'en faire seulement l'extrait, en laissant le jugement aux lecteurs. Je n'en connais aucun qui ait tenu parole et je crois en effet cette indifférence si impossible, que c'est une des raisons qui me font mettre la critique au rang des principaux devoirs d'un journaliste <sup>3</sup>. " It is not strange therefore that his critical work should stand out from that of his contemporaries.

In a citation from Montaigne — and Prévost cites him frequently — we begin to see that the " rules " are not going to dominate the judgments of the author of the *Pour et Contre*. In fact, the passage in question puts literary opinions on what is practically an impressionistic basis. However cautious one may be now before such a doctrine, it was not without peculiar advantages when practiced in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the reaction against the rules, though beginning <sup>4</sup>, was still viewed with suspicion, not to say alarm, by many; and for a Frenchman about to make known to his countrymen the beauties of English literature it was essential that he should rid himself as far as possible of preconceived intellectual criteria and give free rein to his natural impulses. Here is Montaigne's

1. PC., IX, 103.

2. Probably English influence in this.

3. PC., VII, 4, note (a). Cf. *supra*. Prévost has seen that his policy of neutrality will not work.

4. See Mornet, " La question des règles au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, " *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France*, 1944, pp. 241 and 542.

idea of taste — and to a degree at least Prévost's own. "On demande quelquefois ce que c'est que le goût. Écoutez Montaigne. Un ravissement, un ravage. Il n'est pas question de voir. Les yeux les plus ouverts et les plus fermes voyent-ils la splendeur d'un éclair? Ils sentent. Avoir du goût, c'est sentir par la vue, par l'ouïe, etc. Définissez-le mieux <sup>1</sup>."

This invoking of Montaigne is particularly to be noted. Prévost cites him frequently. Later the Abbé Le Blanc, whose *Lettres d'un François* were published in 1745 and written from 1738 to 1744, does the same. Voltaire of course underwent his profoundly liberalizing influence. Montaigne in the eighteenth century came into his own. His was a spirit deeply convinced that everything in literature and in morals is relative, not absolute. So his influence was directed full-tilt against all which the seventeenth century had erected as definite and unchanging, and against all which in the eighteenth century, and in the first half particularly, still was molded upon that absolute ideal. Among those influences which tended to emancipate Prévost from established prejudices, we must by no means fail to consider Montaigne as very important.

Some one may object that the following passage takes away much from our idea of the seriousness of Prévost's purpose. "A l'égard de ma feuille, je me sou mets volontiers au jugement que mes lecteurs en peuvent porter. Le seul mérite que je lui souhaite est de leur plaire. C'est un ouvrage d'amusement pour eux et pour moi; et je confesse que ceux qui feroient monter sa valeur au-delà, m'accorderoient plus que je ne leur demande <sup>2</sup>." It is, however, essential to note, not only that this is but one against many of a contrary character, but especially that it is written by way of defense against the criticisms of an author aggrieved at being judged unfavorably, in the *Pour et Contre*. Furthermore, however sincere Prévost might be in intention, as the editor of a popular journal he

1. PC., VI, 213-14.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.



was at times compelled to be prudent, always impelled to please, so that we need not be surprised to find him softening down whatever the public might find too severe or too bold. This fact should constantly be considered in judging his work. Primarily he was a journalist, not a scholar.

But he did have a serious purpose in mind, and a definite one. This we have already seen. We may see it again in the following passage : " Ne différons donc plus à donner au *Pour et Contre* un but sérieux et régulier. Aussi simple dans ce choix que j'ai toujours tâché de l'être dans ma manière de penser et d'écrire, je me propose de faire remarquer la différence réelle et constante qui se trouve entre les pays de l'Europe où les sciences et les arts sont le mieux cultivés, et surtout entre la France et l'Angleterre... Un autre avantage du but que je me propose, c'est que les soixante nombres que je laisse derrière moi, peuvent naturellement s'y rapporter. Ainsi quoique j'aie marché comme au hasard dans les quatre volumes précédents, il se trouve que je n'ai point fait de pas inutiles <sup>1</sup>. "

Prévost had very fully the cosmopolitan viewpoint. In the fifth volume of the *Pour et Contre* he makes his mouthpiece <sup>2</sup>, the English " ministre <sup>3</sup>, " say : " Pour juger sainement de

1. PC., V, 6-7.

2. It is of course evident that caution must always be observed in making an author responsible for the opinions he puts into the mouth of one of his characters. Thus Texte, in his *J. J. Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire* (p. 124 and pp. 130-31), has gone too far when he interprets some of Bomston's most exaggerated expressions in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* as being Rousseau's own attitude toward the English, when they are only in the character of the speaker. But that the " ministre " does here express Prévost's own ideas we have convincing proof, not only in the passage cited *infra* from PC., XX, 69, which indicates the same attitude of mind, but also in the following : " Mais avec le droit que je me suis réservé de n'être pas toujours de même sentiment que lui [le ministre], j'aurai soin de réduire du moins ses thèses en problèmes, et de ne rien approuver qui ne soit conforme aux principes de religion, de bienséance et de vérité, qui sont établis parmi nous. Il ne me paroît pas jusqu'à présent qu'il s'en soit écarté. " PC., V, 42-43.

3. Apparently a reminiscence of Addison's methods.

nos ouvrages d'esprit, ils [les Français] doivent avoir égard à nos usages et à nos mœurs... Or je doute que la différence ait jamais été plus grande entre les usages de l'ancienne Grèce et ceux de la France, qu'elle l'est entre ceux de Paris et de Londres. On auroit mauvaise grace de nous objecter, que vivant dans le même siècle, c'est notre faute si nous n'avons pas aujourd'hui plus de conformité avec les François. Il faudroit avoir décidé auparavant que leurs usages sont plus estimables que les nôtres, et que ce ne sont pas les Anglois qui méritent effectivement qu'on aspire à leur ressembler<sup>1</sup>. " The same idea is later repeated for emphasis. " Mais je ne répéterai point ce que j'ai dit mille fois sur la nécessité de connoître non seulement le goût et les principes, mais les affaires et les intérêts d'une nation, pour juger du droit qu'une pièce a d'y être applaudie<sup>2</sup>. "

In the words of the Minister and in those of Prévost himself expression is given to the theory of relativity, the relation of literature to institutions and manners, and its dependence upon them. The same idea which we have already had occasion to note in Montaigne is found in Fénelon's *Lettre à l'Académie*<sup>3</sup>, written in 1714, published in 1716, and it is worth while to call attention to the fact that Prévost and Fénelon have much in common in their suppleness of mind, their politeness and charm of manner, their easy style, and their general largeness of taste.

But whatever influences may have come to Prévost through the ordinary channels of literature, it is impossible to overlook the fact that a great deal is due also to the circumstances of his life, which was varied and active and which early put him in a position to observe the manners and mode of thought of different people and different orders of society. What he has thus learned he wishes to bring back to his own country

1. PC., V, 32-33.

2. *Ibid.*, XX, 69.

3. " Chaque nation a ses mœurs, très différentes de celles des peuples voisins. " Fénelon, *Œuvres*, II, 349.

in order that the French people may understand foreign literatures, character and manners, and perfect their own taste. It is significant that Prévost does not hold that everything in disaccord with French rules is necessarily wrong. On the contrary, he believes that the French can really benefit by this familiarity with other modes of thought, for he observes that " tout ce qui peut servir à l'histoire du goût dans les différens siècles, est extrêmement propre à régler le nôtre, et convient particulièrement à cette feuille <sup>1</sup>. "

This " tout, " however, had its very definite limits. Prévost, like Figaro, knew that he must speak only of safe things — another reason for giving literature a dominant place, for, violent as literary quarrels were likely to be at that time, they were not apt to bring about dangerous difficulties with the civil authorities. There were two subjects of the utmost importance and interest which he felt constrained to avoid. " La seule chose à regretter est que je me sois interdit toutes les matières de religion et de politique; car c'est surtout à l'égard de ces deux articles que les Anglois se piquent d'une singularité brillante : mais le tort que je fais à mes lecteurs en m'imposant cette loi, n'égale point celui que je pourrois leur causer en la violant <sup>2</sup>. " It was the first half of the century, when English philosophy, English tolerance, and the English constitution were the things most admired in France, rather than English *belles lettres*. Thus, for various reasons, Prévost is exerting his influence in another direction calculated to prepare the stronger current of literary admiration characteristic of the second part of the century.

1. PC.; XIV., 356.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 54. For the political side, cf. the *Spectator*, cited by Beljame, p. 286 : " Je n'ai jamais épousé les idées d'aucun parti avec violence et je suis résolu à observer une neutralité absolue entre les whigs et les tories. " The silence on religious matters may well be due after all to necessity. Note that the first number of the *Pour et Contre* was approved only after a censoring out of " ce qui regarde les affaires ecclésiastiques. " Harris, p. 210.

## CHAPTER V

## PRÉVOST'S PREPARATION

A word, before passing on, regarding the Abbé's preparation for treating the particular subject in hand. How well did he know the English language? Texte tells us that "Prévost, forcé de vivre en Angleterre et d'y gagner sa vie, s'y anglicisa plus qu'aucun autre écrivain du dix-huitième siècle. Il apprit à fond la langue du pays, et de ce jour, se fit traducteur gagé des livres anglais <sup>1</sup>." Whether he was, as Texte says, without equal in the whole course of the eighteenth century may well be questionable, but all the evidence that we have indicates at the least that Prévost did learn English very well indeed. There are some curious details regarding the method he employed <sup>2</sup>. In two days (!) he learned the necessary rudiments of the grammar, and the declensions and conjugations. Then, putting aside his grammar, he set himself to acquire a vocabulary. Dividing the words to be learned into five classes, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions, he wrote them out on large sheets of paper in parallel columns with the French and hung them on the wall where he could see them conveniently while getting ready for bed. Each morning he tested himself on those learned the night before. After two weeks spent in this way, he began reading easy prose with the aid of a dictionary. At this time also he began spending a regular part of his day reading aloud before some Englishman who could make the necessary corrections. Within a month from the time he started he was able to read all kinds of prose, and only then did he set himself to mastering the grammatical rules, their exceptions and complexities.

1. Texte, *Rousseau et... Cosmopolitisme litt.*, p. 54.

2. PC., XVI, 327-33.

This method, as he describes it, seems to indicate a practical bent and a readiness to break with tradition, if it appeared desirable, and to block out new methods. Of course it is quite certain that in his mode of statement Prévost has fallen into naïve exaggeration, especially in the matter of the short time in which he gained a perfect knowledge of the language, and this might easily make the whole appear ridiculous. Prévost shows, however, a knowledge of the value of our subconscious processes which is worthy of praise. Speaking of the reason why he memorized vocabulary just before going to bed, he says : “ Car c'est le tems le plus favorable à la mémoire, parce que le repos du sommeil sert ensuite à confirmer les traces du cerveau <sup>1</sup>. ”

Of his translations we shall have more to say later. They show that he understood the language well, and the deviations from the original are due to intention and not to ignorance, except perhaps in one case noted in connection with his translation of the Hamlet soliloquy. As further evidence of the success of his method — with him at any rate — we have a letter written by Prévost to Thieriot in English. It has been published with the correspondence of Voltaire and also by Harris in his volume on Prévost.

“ De l'abbaye de la Croix-Saint-Leufroy, novembre 1735.

“ I receiv'd your *Magazines*, Jacob's works <sup>2</sup>, etc. and every thing shall be kept in good order to return in your hands when I'm at Paris. But why don't you send what you spoke to me of, concerning Mr. Voltaire and cardinal Alberoni's letter? You may be sure I shall make the best use of it which is in my power. Perhaps you are angry at me, for not having spoken of *Julius Caesar's death*, and the wrong edition of it ; but Dear Sir if you remember that the same week I receiv'd your letter, your very same account of M. Voltaire's Tragedy was publish'd in the *Observations upon the modern*

1. PC., p. 329.

2. Hildebrand Jacob, criticized later in PC., IX, 188-208; XIX, 182-92; 351-53.



*Writings*, by no means you can't take ill that I would not be another's *Écho*, and humbly repeat what M. Desfontaines had told before me. There is no occasion wherein I'm not ready to declare myself one of Mr. Voltaire's admirers, though I'm told lately he has not spoke of me in the best terms of the world ; but my heart if not my merit, is above these little trifles. I'm quite unknown to Mr. Voltaire, and I'm as bold as to say that no body who knows both my person and my way of thinking and living can hate or condemn me.

“ You expect no news from a poor countryman, who thinks himself alone upon the earth, so out of use he is of seeing men or women in the most solitary place of the world. When you have nothing better to do, could not you write to me, as bad and carelessly as you please, what you hear and see every day at Paris? I'm condemn'd to live here to the 10th. of december, and no sollicitations could prevail on the Pope to lessen my spiritual punishment.

“ Cleveland and that dear Fanny are not out of my mind, but great many <sup>1</sup> friends of mine, on whose counsels and wisdom I rely, advised me to publish no love-worcks til my retreat be over. Tis the only reason why the second part of *Killerine* has not been printed yet.

“ No compliments for your *Phyché* (*sic*), since you think it so dangerous for my repose. I wo'nt see her more neither, till I have got hundered thousand a year. Then I can love, and tell it and hope to be well received. Farewell, Dear Sir. Have you seen M. de Chester? Your humble servant.

“ L'abbé Prévost <sup>2</sup>. ”

This is English, reasonably correct, even idiomatic, in struc-

1. So given by HARRISSE, p. 254, for “ a great many. ” As given in the *Œuvres de Voltaire*, ed. Garnier frères, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 467-68, it reads “ at great many, ” obviously a misprint.

2. HARRISSE, pp. 253-54. Also in Voltaire as noted. The text in Voltaire varies, not in the sense, but in spelling and minor details of the wording. Apparently it has been “ corrected. ”

ture <sup>1</sup>. A comparison with Voltaire's English letters is not perhaps altogether fair to the latter, since we have so many more of them, and therefore so many more chances of finding him in error. If, however, we can form a judgment on this one letter of Prévost's, it seems that his English is slightly more correct, but less forceful, than Voltaire's. Prévost says, for instance : " Every thing shall be kept in good order to return in your hands when *I'm* at Paris, " using the present tense in the dependent clause with future meaning, as regularly in English ; Voltaire writes after the more strictly logical French fashion : " The first letter *I shall receive* from you will be <sup>2</sup>. " Voltaire offers a number of un-English constructions which are not paralleled in Prévost : " One obeys *to* the laws only and *to* one's whims <sup>3</sup> " ; " very convenient for a print or *to* a medal <sup>4</sup> " ; " I flatter myself... you will come to see the house I *build* <sup>5</sup>. " Prévost has a double negative : " By no means you can't take ill, " and also : " I wo'nt see her more neither, " provided that, as seems probable, Harrisse's text is correct. The other text reads : " By no means can you take it ill, " which is probably " corrected. " Prévost has also the French-sounding " best terms *of* the world, " and the " most solitary place *of* the world. " The prepositions, the foreigner's bugbear in other languages besides English, are, however, on the whole remarkably correct in Prévost's letter ; Vol-

1. The variants in the text as given in the works of Voltaire are rather numerous. The following are the most important : " I am " regularly for " I'm " ; " do not " for " don't " ; " the Death of Julius Caesar " for " Julius Caesar's death " ; " he has not spoken " for " he has not spoke " ; " till the tenth of December " for " to the 10th. of december " ; " whose " for " whoose " ; " have advised " for " advised " ; " love works " for " love-worcks " ; " till " for " til " ; " It is " for " T'is " ; " not yet been printed " for " not been printed yet " ; " Psyche " for " Psyché " ; " think " for " thinck " ; " will not see " for " wo'nt see " ; " more till " for " more neither, till " ; " hundred for " hundered " ; etc.

2. *Œuvres*, XXXIII, pp. 255-56.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 470.

taire <sup>1</sup> has a great deal more difficulty with them. It should be noted also that Prévost's letter was written in France and, more than that, while he was in retreat, which makes it almost certain that we possess an English letter in his own style and not one corrected by some English friend of his acquaintance.

## CHAPTER VI

### PREVOST AND VOLTAIRE'S *LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES*

It is hardly possible to treat Prévost's opinions of English literature without making frequent references to, or comparisons with, the *Lettres philosophiques* of Voltaire. So it seems especially desirable to begin this study of Prévost's criticism by noting what he himself said of Voltaire's work. His review of the Letters appeared six months before their publication in French and shortly after that of the 1733 English edition. Prévost had, however, as he himself tells us <sup>2</sup>, seen the French original, and in fact calls attention to certain mistakes in the English translation which appeared at London, August 14 or 16, 1733 <sup>3</sup>. The first French edition, pirated by Jore, did not begin to circulate until about the middle of April, 1734 <sup>4</sup>. Prévost's articles form part of Volume I of the *Pour et Contre*, Numbers XI, XII, and XIII. They appeared the latter part of September and the first part of October, 1733. Thus the first public appearance of the *Lettres philosophiques* in French <sup>5</sup>

1. Cf. L. Foulet, *Correspondance de Voltaire 1726-1729*, Paris, 1913 pp. 53-54, p. 94, p. 103, p. 113, p. 136, p. 147, p. 158, for similar errors.

2. PC., I, 242.

3. Lanson, *Introd. to ed. of Lettres phil.*, 1909, Vol. I, p. XL.

4. *Ibid.*

5. At least Prévost's is the first French review of Voltaire's Letters which M. Lanson *op. cit.*, I, XLIV considers important enough to be mentioned.

was probably in the form of the very full *compte rendu* by Prévost the month following the publication of the English edition<sup>1</sup>. So it is the more interesting to note his attitude.

After paying various compliments to Voltaire and mentioning the eagerness of the English public to read the Letters, Prévost calls attention to the translator's error in making Voltaire's reference to Luther and Calvin as authors "qu'on ne lit plus guères aujourd'hui" read, "que ce ne sont que de *misérables* auteurs (all of 'em wretched authors, p. 49)<sup>2</sup>." "Si l'on excepte quelques autres fautes de cette nature, la traduction de M. Lockman ne paroîtra guères inférieure à l'original<sup>3</sup>." Then follows a brief general indication of the content of the Letters, and after this is a significant passage:

"La lecture [des Lettres philosophiques] est amusante. Il y a de l'esprit, de l'agrément : mais qui s'attendroit à voir sortir rien de grossier de sa plume ? D'ailleurs, il est question de sçavoir si l'exactitude se trouve toujours dans les faits, la vérité dans les réflexions, la justice dans la critique, etc., enfin s'il n'y a pas dans quelques endroits de la distinction à faire entre le bel esprit, et l'écrivain juste et exact<sup>4</sup>."

This fair estimate and query may still hold to a great extent to-day. Prévost proceeds to make certain remarks which support his contention and give a truer and more exact idea of the Quakers, the state of commerce in England, etc. These show that he had obtained an accurate knowledge of the country and that he was interested in giving his countrymen a true account of conditions as he had found them. The pleasure of correcting Voltaire entered also no doubt into his reasons. As usual, he avoids carefully all discussion of politics or religion<sup>5</sup>, but promises a more complete treatment of the following letters, which deal with the safer field of literature.

1. Number XII is followed by : "Lu et approuvé, ce 22. Septembre 1733. Signé, Souchay." PC., I, 288.

2. PC., I, 242-43, and note (a).

3. *Ibid.*, 243.

4. *Ibid.*, 244-45.

5. *Ibid.*, 248.

He resumes first what Voltaire has to say about the life of Lord Bacon and repeats the anecdote which made Bolingbroke say of his enemy, Marlborough : " C'étoit un si grand homme que j'ai oublié tous ses vices. " Thus Voltaire, apropos of Bacon's having received bribes, and having been disgraced by Parliament. Prévost continues : " Ainsi l'estime extraordinaire des Anglois pour le Lord Bacon, ne leur permet plus de regarder en lui " que le père de la nouvelle philosophie, l'habile historien, le bel esprit, et l'élégant écrivain. " C'est lui qui a reconnu le premier tout ce qu'il y a de puéril dans la philosophie des Anciens, et qui a fait les premiers pas vers les connoissances solides par la voye des *expériences*. A la vérité l'on avoit fait avant lui des découvertes admirables ; mais on ne les avoit dues qu'au hazard. L'aiguille aimantée, l'imprimerie, l'art de graver sur le cuivre et de peindre à l'huile, les lunettes, la poudre à canon, étoient déjà des choses connues. On avoit même découvert un nouveau monde. Mais avec la connoissance de tant de merveilles, on n'étoit pas plus avancé dans celles de la nature. Un certain instinct mécanique avoit été le seul guide des hommes dans toutes ces recherches ; et c'est une chose fort remarquable, que les plus belles inventions soient venues des siècles les plus grossiers et les plus barbares. Bacon a commencé à mettre de l'ordre et de la clarté dans les connoissances physiques. Il a rectifié les découvertes précédentes, il en a fait de nouvelles, et il a ouvert le chemin à tout ce qu'il y a de bons physiciens après lui. Il s'en est peu fallu qu'il n'ait découvert la pesanteur de l'air. Il avoit déjà quelques conjectures de son élasticité. Mais ce qui doit être plus surprenant pour les Anglois, c'est " qu'on " trouve en termes exprès dans un endroit de ses ouvrages, le " nouveau système de l'attraction, dont ils attribuent l'honneur " à Sir Isaac Newton. " M... porte son jugement sur les autres ouvrages du Chancelier Bacon. Ses Essais de Morale sont fort estimables ; s'ils sont moins lus que les Maximes de la Rochefoucault et les Essais de Montagne, c'est uniquement parce qu'il est moins satyrique que le premier, et moins sceptique



que le second, quoique dans le fond beaucoup plus instructif. Pour ce qui regarde son Histoire d'Henri VII, il ne paroît pas que M... en ait une haute idée. Il s'offense même qu'on ait osé la comparer avec celle du Président de Thou, et il en cite quelques endroits qui ne sauroient soutenir en effet une si glorieuse comparaison <sup>1</sup>.

“ Pour m'expliquer sans flatterie, cette douzième lettre est journée si agréablement, malgré le mélange sérieux d'un peu de philosophie, qu'elle fait quelque tort aux cinq suivantes. M..., en parlant de Locke et de Newton, veut absolument n'être que philosophe. Il entreprend d'exposer leurs systèmes ; il les fait raisonner, il raisonne avec eux ; il leur fait dire de fort bonnes choses, et il en dit lui-même qui le sont aussi ; mais le beau sexe qui fait déjà la moitié du monde, et les trois quarts au moins de l'autre moitié, l'auroient volontiers dispensé de cet étalage de science philosophique. Ils auroient souhaité du moins qu'imitant certain *Enchanteur qui fait parler les morts et promène son lecteur si agréablement dans la lune*, il eût tempéré la sécheresse de sa matière par quelque fiction agréable, ou par quelque autre enfin de ces tours heureux, qui coûtent si peu à une belle imagination. Il se seroit fait lire avec autant d'utilité que d'agrément ; au lieu que des sept huitièmes du monde dont j'ai parlé, à peine se trouvera-t-il quelqu'un qui ait soutenu une lecture si longue sans se faire à soi-même le tort de sauter quelques pages. Pour le dernier huitième, comme il est composé d'esprits profonds, bien instruits, et avec cela difficiles et un peu orgueilleux, ils ont lu ; mais ils n'ont point paru contents qu'on ait entrepris d'expliquer la philosophie ancienne et moderne dans cinq petites Lettres, et ils prétendent que c'est manquer de respect pour des personnages tels que Newton, Descartes, Locke, etc., que de vouloir donner *une légère idée* de leurs profondes spéculations. Ainsi M... a trop fait pour les uns, et n'a point fait assez pour les autres <sup>2</sup>. ”

1. Particularly adapted to please Prévost as the translator of De Thou.

2. PC., I, 273-78.

In thus criticizing Voltaire for not following Fontenelle, Prévost was repeating, no doubt, what was frequently said by the London wiseacres of the time. The whole was reasonable enough certainly on the face of it, but the event proved that it was Prévost who was wrong, and not Voltaire <sup>1</sup>. We see also on the part of the former a strong desire to please the public of the salons, the same public to whom he addressed his novels and who must on no account be bored. However, Fontenelle's "marquise," though still existing, had made great strides in the period of nearly half a century which separated the *Entretiens* from the *Lettres*, and the mental pabulum did not need such a thick sugar-coating as Prévost thought.

"On oublie bientôt ce léger sujet de plainte, lorsqu'on est arrivé à la dix-huitième lettre, qui roule sur la tragédie. L'auteur est là sur son propre terrain. Il n'a besoin ni de fiction pour arrêter ses lecteurs, ni d'efforts pour leur plaire. Il s'explique sur le théâtre Anglois en artiste habile, qui par un long et heureux exercice de sa profession s'est acquis le droit de juger du travail des autres. Après avoir remarqué que les Anglois et les Espagnols ont eus des théâtres réglez (a) avant les François, il examine sur quoi la haute réputation de Shakespear est fondée. Ce poète tragique avoit reçu tout son mérite de la nature. Il ne paroît dans ses ouvrages (b) ni goût, ni connoissance des règles ; mais il s'y trouve par tout des étincelles du plus beau feu du monde. C'étoit une imagination naturellement sublime, qui n'ayant point d'autre guide qu'elle-même, s'est

1. Jordan wrote, in his *Histoire d'un voyage littéraire fait en 1733 en France, en Angleterre et en Hollande*, 1735, pp. 186-87: "Mr. de Voltaire m'écrivit sur ce sujet, et se plaint que Mr. Prévôt le traite un peu mal dans son *Pour et Contre*. Ce qui lui fait le plus de peine, c'est que Mr. Prévôt critique les endroits qui roulent sur *Lock* et *Newton*. "Ce Mr., dit-il, "voudroit que j'eusse imité la Pluralité des Mondes de Fontenelle, et que "j'eusse le ridicule de dire de jolies choses sur la règle de Kepler, et sur "la gravitation en raison inverse des quarrés de distance." Je trouve que Mr. de Voltaire a raison, et qu'il n'est pas naturel que dans des lettres, où l'on traite ordinairement les sujets avec plus de légèreté que dans les dissertations particulières, on examine à fond des matières de la philosophie la plus profonde, qui demandent, pour être éclaircies, des volumes, et des ouvrages faits *ex professo*."

égarée souvent dans sa route. M... entre dans le détail de ses défauts. Il n'en lui reproche point que les Anglois ne reconnoissent ; mais en confessant même que son exemple, ainsi que le remarque l'auteur, a fait tort à un grand nombre de poètes de sa nation qui l'ont imité trop servilement, ils ne conviennent point que la plupart de ses " saillies déréglées et de ses bizarres " (lettre XVIII, p. 167) imaginations aient acquis par la longueur du temps le droit de passer pour sublimes. " C'est une injure, disent-ils, que l'auteur fait à toute l'Angleterre. On y sçait distinguer ce qui est véritablement sublime d'avec ce qui ne l'est pas, et l'on n'y admire dans Shakespear que ce qui l'est effectivement <sup>1</sup>. "

" (a) Shakespear et Lopez de Vega ont été comme les fondateurs du théâtre en Espagne et en Angleterre, l'un sous Philippe second, et l'autre sous Elizabeth <sup>2</sup>. "

" (b) J'adoucis l'expression du traducteur ; *not so much as a single spark of good taste*. Elle est outrée, et elle a choqué ici bien des gens. "

Note that Prévost in the interest of accuracy characteristically softens the opinion that Shakespear was " sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût, et sans la moindre connoissance des règles, " as Voltaire's text reads, and notice also that " il s'y trouve par tout des étincelles du plus beau feu du monde, " and " c'étoit une imagination naturellement sublime, qui n'ayant point d'autre guide qu'elle-même s'est égarée souvent dans sa route, " are not a close paraphrase of Voltaire at all, but the expression of Prévost's own admiration, strongly tempered nevertheless by the feeling that Shakespear would have gained much by being more regular <sup>3</sup>. It

1. PC., I, 278-79.

2. This also is taken from Voltaire, with the names of Elizabeth and Philip added by Prévost.

3. But Prévost does not acknowledge these as his own opinions. As he expresses them they might well be taken for Voltaire's. The " plus beau feu du monde " is perhaps a strengthening of such phrases of Voltaire as " un génie plein de force et de fécondité, " and as " de si belles scènes, des morceaux si grands et si terribles répandus dans ses farces

should be noted that Prévost claims to be expressing only the more "enlightened" English opinion of the time, quite ready to admit often that Shakespear had fallen into "saillies déréglées et de bizarres imaginations," and that "taste" had made great strides since his time. For the most rabid expression of this attitude it is necessary to cite only Rymer<sup>1</sup>, who surpasses in fault-finding anything that Voltaire ever wrote. Perhaps it has not been enough emphasized that if the French critics of the time were too much given to seeing defects in Shakespear rather than beauties, they had every precedent in many of the foremost spokesmen of English contemporary criticism<sup>2</sup>.

Prévost continues: "M... pour faire mieux connoître en France le génie de Shakespear, a traduit en vers françois un des plus beaux endroits de ce poète. C'est le monologue de *Hamlet*, qui délibère s'il doit vivre ou se donner la mort... Il est certain qu'une si belle traduction fait naître une grande idée de l'original. Mais il me vient à l'esprit, pour mettre tout à fait le lecteur en état d'en juger, de joindre ici la traduction littérale du passage de Shakespear<sup>3</sup>."

"Etre, ou n'être point, voilà de quoi il est question. Voyons quel est le plus glorieux, ou de souffrir les traits et les outrages de la mauvaise fortune, ou de s'armer contre une mer de troubles, et de les finir en s'y opposant. Mourir! Qu'est-ce donc que mourir? C'est dormir. C'est n'être plus. Et ce som-

monstrueuses, qu'on appelle tragédies." Note that Voltaire characteristically takes away with one hand what he has given with the other. "Une imagination naturellement sublime" is indeed based on the "génie plein... de naturel et de sublime," but the rest of the sentence is not found in Voltaire's Letters.

1. Says Rymer in an appreciative judgment of *Othello*: "There is in this Play some burlesk, some humour and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew and some Mimicry to divert the spectators; but the tragical part is plainly none other than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour." *Short View*, found in Spingarn, *Critical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 253.

2. These spokesmen were of course themselves much under French influence.

3. The *Bibliothèque britannique*, 1733-47, in the section for Oct.-Dec., 1733, reviewed the *Lettres philosophiques*.

“ meil termine toutes les douleurs, nous délivre de mille tour-  
 “ mens qui sont notre partage naturel... Ah ! c'est une consom-  
 “ mation totale, qui ne peut être trop désirée. Mourir, dor-  
 “ mir... dormir, peut-être rêver... voilà l'épine. La mort est  
 “ un sommeil, mais les rêves qui peuvent la suivre quand  
 “ nous serons une fois dépouillés de cette enveloppe mortelle,  
 “ forcent ici le plus rebelle de s'arrêter. Voilà, voilà le frein  
 “ qui empêche de regimber contre les calamitez d'une longue  
 “ vie. Car qui pourroit se résoudre à souffrir les injures du tems,  
 “ les injustices de l'oppresser, les affronts qu'attire la pau-  
 “ vreté, les tourmens de l'amour méprisé, les délais de la jus-  
 “ tice et les ennuyeux rebuts que l'humble mérite essuye de la  
 “ part des plus indignes ? Qui voudroit vivre exposé à tant  
 “ d'outrages, lorsqu'il pourroit assurer son repos d'un simple  
 “ coup de poinçon ? Qui voudroit supporter un tel fardeau,  
 “ suer et gémir sous le poids d'une vie misérable, si la crainte  
 “ de quelque chose qui doit suivre la mort ; si l'obscurité de  
 “ ce païs d'où jamais voyageur n'est retourné, ne mettoit  
 “ nos désirs en confusion, et ne nous réduisoit à souffrir plutôt  
 “ les misères présentes, qu'à nous précipiter dans d'autres  
 “ maux qui nous sont inconnus ? Ainsi la conscience nous  
 “ rend timides, et la fleur de la résolution se trouve flétrie  
 “ tout d'un coup par la pâle influence de la réflexion. ”

“ Il y a quelques vers dans ce beau passage qu'il seroit impos-  
 sible de rendre en françois mot pour mot. Mais je me suis  
 attaché à l'anglois autant que notre langue l'a permis. Ceux  
 qui savent quelle différence il y a souvent entre une expres-  
 sion et une expression, quoique dans les différentes langues  
 elles soient employées à signifier la même chose, n'auront pas  
 de peine à s'imaginer que l'original l'emporte beaucoup sur  
 ma traduction. Je traduis par exemple *the whips and scorns of*  
*time*, par le mot général d'*injuries du tems*, qui est le seul que  
 m'ait offert notre langue. Cela est bien éloigné de répondre à  
 la force *whips and scorns of time*. L'expression angloise est  
 une figure, à laquelle nous n'avons rien d'équivalent. Un  
 Anglois se trouveroit sans doute dans le même embarras, s'il



entreprenoit la traduction de quelque scène de Corneille <sup>1</sup>. "

Prévost is clearly conscious, not only of the general difficulty of translation and the loss which poetry in particular suffers in passing from one language to another <sup>2</sup>, but, much more specifically, of wherein consists a great part of this difficulty. He notes the necessity of considering, not merely the meaning of an expression, but its force and its associations, its "color."

In the reproduction of Voltaire's verse-translation of the Hamlet monologue, Prévost, or perhaps the censor, has cut the line

to " De nos prêtres menteurs bénir l'hipocrisie "

and changed " De bénir.....l'hipocrisie, "

to " Ramper sous un ministre, adorer ses hauteurs "

" Ramper aux pieds des grands, adorer leurs hauteurs. "

Of Voltaire's weak first lines, " Demeure, il faut choisir, et passer à l'instant, De la vie à la mort, et de l'être au néant, " Prévost says: " Le vers anglois... a beaucoup plus de force dans sa simplicité. *To be, or not to be ! that is the question.* " On the exclamation, " Dieux cruels, s'il en est !, " he comments: " Voilà un blasphème que l'auteur prête gratuitement à Hamlet. Il n'y a rien d'approchant dans l'anglois, et rien n'est si contraire au caractère de la pièce, où l'on ne trouve, dit Mylord Shaftesbury, " no ranting at the gods, no blustering heroison, " no adoration or flattery of the sex, nor any thing of that curious mixture of the fierce and tender which makes the hinge of modern tragedy. " Advice to an Author, p. 276 <sup>3</sup>. "

1. PC., I, 280-84.

2. The *Bibliothèque britannique* II, 123 takes note of these difficulties in a purely general and conventional way. Du Bos, however, had pointed them out much more clearly as far as the classics were concerned. Prévost doubtless had read Du Bos.

3. PC., I, 280, notes a and b. The pagination in the fourth edition of Shaftesbury, Dublin, 1737-43, 3 vols., is the same as Prévost's.

Prévost's translation, undertaken in the interest of literalness, does of course represent Shakespear much better than Voltaire's<sup>1</sup>. While some parts might, it seems, be still closer to the original than they are, the improvement is nevertheless great, especially for the time<sup>2</sup>. One mistranslation should be pointed out. "To die ; to sleep ; No more" is made to read : " Mourir ! Qu'est-ce donc que mourir ? C'est dormir. C'est n'être plus, " instead of " ce n'est rien de plus, " or simply " rien de plus, " as later in Voltaire's literal translation and in those of Le Tourneur and Hugo fils. The *Bibliothèque britannique*<sup>3</sup> rendered it correctly as " voilà tout. " The translation, however, of the latter, taken as a whole, is much weaker than Prévost's. It abounds in paraphrases. The simple " être, ou n'être point " becomes " être, ou cesser d'être " ; " une mer de troubles, " which is almost a literal translation of Shakespear, appears as the all too *précieux* " un déluge de maux. " Likewise Prévost's literal " de les finir [les maux] en s'y opposant " degenerates into " à les terminer en dépit de la fortune. " Examples might be found throughout. The Le Tourneur and Hugo fils translations<sup>4</sup>, as is to be expected, are generally more literal than Prévost's. If some passages are better rendered, however, others are weaker. On the whole, neither is particularly to be preferred to the Abbé's in spite of the fact that his is the first of them all. Prévost is doing pioneer work, and his tendency is in the right direction, toward fidel-

1. In her study of *Pierre Le Tourneur*, Miss Mary Gertrude Cushing cites (p. 231) a literal translation by Voltaire of the Hamlet monologue as of the 1734 edition of the *Lettres phil.* The Kehl edition (1784-89) does in fact give such a version following the verse-translation mentioned above, but it was borrowed in this posthumous edition from the *Appel à toutes les Nations* of 1761, and never belonged to the *Lettres phil.* (Lanson, ed., 1909, Vol. II, p. 82, note to line 97). Miss Cushing of course was without the benefit of M. Lanson's later study.

2. Cf., for instance, the rendering of the *Bibliothèque britannique* of the same year.

3. *Bibliothèque britannique*, II, 123.

4. Given by Miss Cushing, pp. 232-35. For Hugo fils's translation, see also François-Victor Hugo, *Œuvres complètes de W. Shakespear*, 2nd ed., 1875-81, Vol. 10, pp. 86-87.

ity to the original. He is really surpassed only by Voltaire in his 1761 version, which is in fact remarkable for its literalness and vigor and shows what he was able to do when he chose, though he seems to have given it unwillingly under the pressure of such comments as those of Prévost and of the *Bibliothèque britannique*<sup>1</sup>.

In Prévost's criticism the authority given to Shaftesbury should be noticed : it will be considered more in detail later.

.. Revenons. M. . . ajoute au caractère de Shakespear, celui de Dryden, et traduit aussi un des plus beaux endroits de ses pièces de théâtre. Ce poète tragique auroit pu se rendre beaucoup plus digne de sa haute réputation, s'il eût été plus sensible à la gloire d'être exact, qu'à celle de paroître universel, et de composer avec une extrême facilité. Mais il semble à M. . . que la nature n'a point formé les Anglois (a) pour produire des beautés régulières. Leur imagination languit, dès qu'elle cesse d'être libre. La tragédie même de Caton, qui est d'ailleurs un chef-d'œuvre, ne se soutient point dans toutes ses parties, par la seule raison peut-être que l'auteur a pris trop de soin pour la rendre conforme aux règles. Ajoutez que l'intrigue amoureuse est très mal imaginée, ce qui répand beaucoup de langueur dans toute la pièce. M. . . observe que la coutume d'introduire l'amour " dans les pièces de théâtre " passa de Paris à Londres vers l'an 1660 avec nos rubans et " nos perruques. On a eu dessein, dit-il, de plaire aux dames " par ce changement ? "

.. (a) Mylord Shaftesbury, qui semble avoir connu mieux que personne le génie de sa nation, est d'un sentiment tout opposé. En convenant que les tragédies angloises sont fort éloignées de la perfection, il n'attribue point le mal à d'autre cause qu'à la négligence

1. After translating the Hamlet monologue " aussi littéralement que nous le pourrons sans être absolument barbares ou inintelligibles, " the *Bibliothèque britannique* remarks : " Voilà à peu près ce que dit Shakespear ; voici ce que Mr. de Voltaire lui fait dire. " II, p. 124.

2. The Abbé Du Bos in 1719 had devoted several chapters to the *abuse* of the love motif. *Réflexions sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 6th ed., 1755, Vol. I, pp. 130-34.

des Anglois, dont la source, dit-il, est leur vanité. Ils reconnoissent, ajoute-t-il, en quoi ils manquent ; ils ne veulent point prendre la peine qu'il faut pour être plus exacts. *Miscellaneous Reflexions*, pp. 258-59 <sup>1</sup>. ”

Again the prestige of Shaftesbury. Notice a disposition on the part of Prévost to depict the English, not as a people with a fundamentally different conception of literary art from that of the French, but simply as “ knowing the better ” — which was French — “ and choosing the worse ” — which was English. This is partly policy, no doubt, but it is also, as the citing of Shaftesbury shows, in the English thought of the time as well. Prévost is inclined, not indeed to reject the strong feeling noticed in the chapters on the general principles of his criticism, that English taste was very different from French and yet still worthy of study, but to emphasize as far as possible the general tendency of the English at this period to approach the French viewpoint. In this he was certainly far more conservative than has usually been supposed, but for that very reason his influence upon his countrymen may have been all the greater.

Notice that Prévost's paraphrasing of Voltaire omits from “ la coutume d'introduire l'amour dans les pièces de théâtre ” the words “ à tort et à travers ” after *amour*. Whether this was an intentional omission or a defect in the text used by Prévost we do not know.

“ La dix-neuvième Lettre n'est pas moins curieuse que la précédente. L'auteur y donne une idée des plus avantageuses de la comédie angloise. Wicherley, Sir John Vanbrug, Congreve, Sir Richard Steele, M. Ciber, etc., sont des auteurs excellens quoique différens chacun dans leur génie. Les pièces de Congreve sont les plus ingénieuses et les plus régulières. Celles de Vanbrug sont plus enjouées. Celles de Wicherley ont plus de force et de feu. En général les Anglois excellent à peindre le ridicule des mœurs. Quoique ces éloges n'ayent pu

1. PC., I, 284-85, and note (a).

manquer de les flatter, ils n'ont pas lu avec plaisir la réflexion suivante. Congreve, dit M. . . , donne à ses personnages le langage qui convient à des gens d'honneur, mais il les fait agir comme des coquins ; preuve qu'il connoissoit parfaitement la nature humaine, et qu'il fréquentoit ce qu'on appelle le monde poli. Ce trait de satire est suivi du récit d'une visite que l'auteur rendoit un jour à M. Congreve <sup>1</sup>. " etc. The well known story follows.

It is probably significant that Prévost expresses no personal opinion regarding the Restoration dramatists. At any rate it is a silence he observes in the main throughout the *Pour et Contre*. He was doubtless repelled by the extreme grossness of the theater at that period. In his novels he avoids with the utmost care any form of expression that might offend against delicacy.

Prévost shortly returns to a consideration of the rest of Voltaire's Letters <sup>2</sup>, but his originality here is slight, and he very nearly limits himself to summarizing Voltaire. Letter XX he criticizes unfavorably. " Elle est d'une sécheresse qui répond mal à son titre, et je suis trompé si les deux pages dont elle est composée, n'ont été faites uniquement pour avoir occasion de placer une petite pièce de vers qui se trouve à la fin <sup>3</sup>. " The next letter is judged favorably, though Prévost thinks that more should have been said about the literary gifts of Rochester, especially after the author had observed at the very beginning that " Saint-Evremond n'a fait connoître dans Mylord Rochester que l'homme de plaisirs, et qu'il se propose de faire connoître en lui l'homme de génie et grand poète <sup>4</sup>. " Then he summarizes Voltaire's account of Waller, but is in error or else using an incorrect text when he makes Voltaire say that " L'indolence ou l'orgueil le fit renoncer à l'exercice des talens qu'il avoit reçus de la nature. " In fact Voltaire's

1. PC., I, 285-86.

2. *Ibid.*, 297-308.

3. *Ibid.*, 297.

4. *Ibid.*, 298.



letter actually says just the opposite: "Waller . . . n'eut jamais ni le sot orgueil ni la nonchalance d'abandonner son talent," doubtless reminiscent of the famous Congreve story already alluded to. "M. Pope, M. Prior, Butler, le Docteur Swift, reçoivent de justes éloges dans la lettre 22<sup>e</sup> 1," says the author of the *Pour et Contre*. He thinks Voltaire's translation of one of the "plus beaux endroits" of the Rape of the Lock "fort supérieure à l'original 2." He objects with much justice to Voltaire's statement that "la délicatesse, le choix, la justesse, le bon goût, se trouvent réunis dans toutes les productions de M. Swift. En vers comme en prose, il est toujours dans les bornes de la raillerie la plus fine, la plus délicate et la plus polie." Prévost corrects: "S'il y a quelque chose à redire à cet éloge, c'est qu'il est un peu trop général: car de l'aveu même des Anglois, il y a quantité de plaisanteries dans les ouvrages de Swift, qui sont basses et indécentes. Son projet de tuer les enfants pour les manger, quand on en a plus qu'on n'en peut nourrir; certaines idées badines qui roulent sur des matières sales et dégoûtantes, etc., tout cela me paraît peu propre à flatter le goût des honnêtes gens 3." This criticism is accurate in its general tendency. It is much nearer the truth than Voltaire's. We are surprised at Prévost's attitude toward Swift's bitterly satirical proposal that the poverty of the Irish should be relieved by the sale of their children as food for the rich 4. He treats it apparently as nothing more than a sorry jest instead of as a sledge-hammer blow at English tyranny. His preoccupation with the "style noble" and with the delicate sensibilities of "les honnêtes gens" is especially to be noted and should serve as a still further re-

1. PC., I, 299.

2. *Ibid.*, 299.

3. *Ibid.*, 300; 300-01, note (a).

4. "A modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or the country, and for making them beneficial to the public" (published in 1729 while P. was in England).

striction upon the largeness of view generally attributed to him<sup>1</sup>.

Prévost goes on to summarize Voltaire. The lack of good historians is attributed to the violent party spirit in England.

"Ils n'ont point de véritables tragédies ; ils ont plusieurs comédies admirables ; il se trouve dans quelques-uns de leurs poèmes des passages d'une beauté surprenante ; leurs philosophes sont dignes de servir de précepteurs à tout le genre humain ; tel est le jugement qu'on peut porter en général des ouvrages et du génie des Anglois<sup>2</sup>" ; thus Voltaire's compact summation of English defects and merits quoted months before the actual publication of his *Lettres* in French. Prévost discusses the letter on the rewards given to literary men and to great men in general ; that on the Royal Society and on the French Academy is regarded "comme une des meilleures parties de son ouvrage<sup>3</sup>." In connection with the project for forming an English Academy, Prior is mentioned and compared, after Voltaire, to La Fontaine ; Pope in the same way is the Boileau of England, and Congreve is the Molière<sup>4</sup>. In concluding, Prévost says :

"Comme mon dessein n'est pas de traduire les *Lettres* de M. . . et que je n'ai eu que deux vues dans cet extrait : l'une, de faire connoître en partie l'ouvrage ; l'autre, d'en emprunter quelques traits agréables pour l'ornement de cette feuille ; je n'abuserai point du droit que l'impression donne sur un livre. Ce que j'ai tiré du sien se fera goûter sans doute, et répondra ainsi aux deux buts que je me suis proposez. Il y reste d'ailleurs mille beautés auxquelles je n'ai pas touché. Je n'ai épuisé ni les louanges, ni la critique<sup>5</sup>."

1. As is natural, Prévost's largeness of view is much greater in theory than in practice. His intelligence acknowledges that French rules are not absolute nor universal in their application, but unconsciously his instincts — French by education and environment — revolt against the esthetic canons admitted in principle.

2. PC., I, 304.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-08.

It seems nevertheless that Prévost has come dangerously near infringing upon the author's rights, for, excluding the parts that might have provoked political or religious controversy, he has resumed him about as fully as he could without actually translating the whole.

If we consider the sum total of Prévost's criticism of the *Lettres philosophiques*, we see that his remarks are usually in the direction of greater truth and of less extreme judgments. It is important to notice that the *Lettres philosophiques* were not only thus summarized six months before the appearance of a French edition, but that their pronouncements on English literature were carefully scrutinized and toned down by one whose views were less warped by violent prejudices and who thus, with all the reserves that I believe it necessary to make, did certainly come nearer to giving a fair estimate of English literature than did Voltaire<sup>1</sup>. Apart from inherent differences of mind and temperament, this is perhaps due to the fact that Prévost in England mingled more with the people of average culture, while Voltaire was associated with aristocratic and court circles, precisely the part of English society which at that time was as near French in taste as people of another nationality well could be. The influence of Prévost's articles was, however, beyond all denial greatly lessened by his refusal to discuss religion or politics. Philosophy and government were still the chief subjects of interest which the French found in England. Her literature was as yet subordinate. Let us not fail to note nevertheless that Prévost was reacting against this general tendency and thus from the very first preparing the current which in the second half of the century swept more and more toward English literature and gave it at least an equal place beside English philosophy and political institutions.

1. Cf. *infra*, pp. 62-64.

## CHAPTER VII

PRÉVOST AND SHAKESPEAR <sup>1</sup>

In Prévost's treatment of Shakespear we have one of the most important parts of his literary criticism and one of the most interesting. Shakespear, as the greatest of English authors and at the same time the most different from those sanctioned by the standards of French classical taste, may be taken almost as the supreme test of the degree of the foreigner's appreciation of English literature. So he has often been taken. So he has been invoked as proof of Prévost's enlightened appreciation of the literature of England. Over Shakespear, war was waged most hotly in France during the last two-thirds of the eighteenth century. It is important, as well as interesting, to examine Prévost's attitude toward the English dramatist. It is worth while to determine how far we may accept as true the conventional opinion that Prévost alone of his French contemporaries entered into the spirit of the king of the English theater and held for him unqualified admiration.

We need not here detail M. Jusserand's work <sup>2</sup>, and relate how the name of Shakespear is found in the inventory of Fouquet's books in 1665, in Boyer's Grammar in 1700, in the *Journal des Savants* in 1708, or, treated with more detail, in the *Journal littéraire de la Haye* for 1717. All these but show the gradual setting of the current toward interest in the English author and prove, if proof were necessary, that he did not in one moment spring forth into the light thanks to the pen of Voltaire.

Muralt, who, it will be remembered, was in England dur-

1. For a more detailed study of this question, cf. my article : " The Abbé Prévost and Shakespear. " *Modern Philology*, XVII (1919), pp. 177-98.

2. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*.

ing 1694 or 1695, but whose Letters were not published till 1725, mentioned Shakespear, but greatly preferred Jonson, and contented himself with the casual remark : " L'Angleterre est un païs de passions et de catastrophes, jusques-là que Schakspear, un de leurs meilleurs anciens poètes, a mis une grande partie de leur histoire en tragédies <sup>1</sup>. "

Voltaire's attitude toward Shakespear we have already seen, so far as the *Lettres philosophiques* are concerned. There are two anterior works which show a somewhat more favorable viewpoint, the *Discours sur la tragédie* prefixed to *Brutus* and printed in 1731, and the French version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, intended as an advance defense of the *Henriade*, and published in 1733. In the first, Voltaire writes in closing : " Peut-être les Français ne souffriraient pas que l'on fit paraître sur leurs théâtres un chœur composé d'artisans et de plébéiens romains ; que le corps sanglant de César y fût exposé aux yeux du peuple, et qu'on excitât ce peuple à la vengeance, du haut de la tribune aux harangues : c'est à la coutume, qui est la reine de ce monde, à changer le goût des nations, et à tourner en plaisir les objets de notre aversion <sup>2</sup>. " Here, even taking into account the fact that he is preparing the public for his own innovations, we have what is really a quite fair and broad-minded attitude. Voltaire is sincere in his admiration, even though he does have an ulterior motive. The proof lies in his desire to imitate those things in English drama which had impressed him so strongly. The closing phrases about changing the taste of a nation are in much the same spirit as those later words of Prévost : " Tout ce qui peut servir à l'histoire du goût dans les différens siècles, est extrêmement propre à régler le nôtre <sup>3</sup>. " For the moment Voltaire also is ready to admit that French taste has not reached the limit of perfectibility.

1. Bêat Louis de Muralt, *Lettres sur les Anglois*, etc., second edition, Cologne, 1727, p. 34.

2. *Œuvres*, II, pp. 316-18.

3. PC., XIV, 356.



The second work mentioned, the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, appeared first in English at the end of 1727 without comment on Shakespear. The French version of 1733 was not simply a translation, but a reworking and an enlargement of the theme. In the course of his remarks on Homer, Voltaire inserted an incidental passage on Shakespear, which reads in part as follows: "Quand je commençai à apprendre la langue anglaise, je ne pouvais comprendre comment une nation si éclairée pouvait admirer un auteur si extravagant; mais dès que j'eus une plus grande connaissance de la langue, je m'aperçus que les Anglais avaient raison, et qu'il est impossible que toute une nation se trompe en fait de sentiment, et ait tort d'avoir du plaisir. Ils voyaient comme moi les fautes grossières de leur auteur favori; mais ils sentaient mieux que moi ses beautés, d'autant plus singulières que ce sont des éclairs qui ont brillé dans la nuit la plus profonde." Then follow these words, which are the high water mark of Voltaire's appreciation of Shakespear: "Tel est le privilège du génie d'invention; il se fait une route où personne n'a marché avant lui; il court sans guide, sans art, sans règle; il s'égare dans sa carrière, mais il laisse loin derrière lui tout ce qui n'est que raison et qu'exactitude<sup>1</sup>."

Even taking into account Voltaire's own grave restrictions on his admiration, we should not fail to recognize here real appreciation and a full acknowledgment of the primal rights of genius. Perhaps, in the estimating of Voltaire's critical attitude, there has been an over-tendency to emphasize his later narrow views, warped as they seemed to be by professional jealousy. Lounsbury has dealt somewhat harshly with him, and more stress might surely with justice be laid upon the substantial accord existing between Voltaire's viewpoint and that of such influential and intelligent Englishmen as Bolingbroke and Shaftesbury. It was not Voltaire's intelligence which was at fault in preventing his later judgments from being equal-

1. *Œuvres*, VIII, pp. 317-18.

ly fair and sound, but his disposition and character. Let us not confuse the two. To expect more favorable criticism than this just quoted, given the conditions (a Frenchman brought up exclusively on classical drama and confirmed in his tastes by an unenlightened English attitude) would surely be unfair. Indeed we shall be fortunate if we see this criticism of Voltaire's equalled for a long time after him.

In 1738 Louis Riccoboni, the famous Lelio of the *Comédie Italienne*, who had been in England at the same time as Voltaire and like him had talked with Congreve <sup>1</sup>, published his *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe*, in which he says that "Guillaume Shaskpearayant consumé son patrimoine, entreprit le métier de voleur <sup>2</sup>". He sums up, however, more accurately. "S'il étoit permis," he says, "de s'écarter de ces règles, que la raison même a dictées, le théâtre anglois seroit en état de balancer la réputation des théâtres anciens et modernes : les beautés des tragédies angloises sont au-dessus de toutes les beautés que les théâtres de l'Europe peuvent nous montrer ; et si quelque jour les poètes anglois se soumettent aux trois unités du théâtre, et s'ils ne présentent pas le sang et les meurtres aux yeux des spectateurs, ils partageront, pour le moins, la gloire dont jouissent les meilleurs de nos théâtres modernes <sup>3</sup>." These are strong words and indicate great admiration. "The beauties of English tragedies surpass all the beauties which European drama can offer."

Thus briefly may we resume the state of critical opinion in France regarding Shakespear up to the year 1738. Little even of this knowledge could be said to extend to the public at large. Prévost was not, however, alone interested in the English dramatist nor was he the only writer who admired Shakespear's genius, even while deploring his "faults."

1. Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques*, etc., 1740 ed., Amsterdam, p. 133.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 124 ff.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

As for the Abbé Prévost himself, what is the opinion of modern critics regarding his attitude toward Shakespear?

"Cet abbé," writes M. Jusserand<sup>1</sup>, "était hérétique dans l'âme; il s'exprime sans respect sur les anciens et sur les règles; et il le fait, ce qui était alors sans exemple, au profit de l'auteur d'*Hamlet*." "Prévost," says Joseph Texte, "forcé de vivre en Angleterre, et d'y gagner sa vie, s'y anglicisa plus qu'aucun autre écrivain du dix-huitième siècle<sup>2</sup>." Faguet says: "Prévost est entièrement favorable à Shakespear... Sa critique est singulièrement juste<sup>3</sup>." M. Baldensperger remarks that "dans le *Pour et Contre*, en 1738, Prévost... félicite le poète [Shakespear] — dont il donnera jusqu'à une biographie circonstanciée — de n'avoir pas connu les Anciens... *Hamlet*, — comparé à *Électre*, — la *Tempête*, les *Joyeuses Commères*, *Othello*, sont l'objet spécial d'un examen sympathique... Prévost donne à son anglomanie sa libre expression<sup>4</sup>." M. Schrøder thinks that "Prévost comprend mieux que Voltaire les audacieuses envolées de Shakespear... Par l'intelligence qu'il a eue de la plupart des beautés shakespeariennes, Prévost a singulièrement devancé les Français de son temps<sup>5</sup>." It has thus become customary to remark that, while Voltaire shows only a rather narrow and timid admiration for Shakespear, Prévost sets scarcely any limit to his enthusiasm and carries it even to the extreme of a veritable Anglomania. However, M. Schrøder himself later brings forward a modification of his own previous opinion, though he does not explain the reasons for his change of heart. This is what he says: "Shakespear lui inspire [à Prévost], comme à Voltaire, une antipathie mêlée d'admiration. Il s'incline devant la vigueur de ses peintures, la saisissante

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

2. Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire*, p. 54.

3. Faguet, "Shakespeare," *Propos de théâtre*, p. 67.

4. Baldensperger, "Esquisse d'une histoire de Shakespeare en France," *Études d'histoire littéraire* (2<sup>e</sup> série, 1910), pp. 459-60.

5. V. Schrøder, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 44.

beauté de ses sujets, il comprend même la philosophie profonde qui anime ses drames, il concède qu'ils font penser, mais les intrigues touffues, mais le mélange presque constant du tragique et du comique devait le choquer et le déconcerter <sup>1</sup>. "

In the face of the unanimity with which critics have singled out Prévost for the distinction of being, as regards his appreciation of Shakespear, the most forward-looking man of his time, it is of special interest to note that the abundant and accurate details given in the *Pour et Contre* with regard to the life of Shakespear, the very favorable judgments cited by M. Jusserand <sup>2</sup> and by M. Baldensperger <sup>3</sup>, the information about the *Winter's Tale*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *Henry VI*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and finally the comparison between Shakespear and Ben Jonson, all this is nothing but " la traduction de certains fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois <sup>4</sup>. " Thus we have here only the opinion of an English admirer of Shakespear, and not the expression of Prévost's own opinions. In fact, after this long article on Shakespear, Prévost is already thinking of bringing forward a " correction. " He says:

" Avant que de hasarder mes propres réflexions sur le caractère et le mérite de Shakespear, je me rends aux instances de quelques amateurs du Parnasse anglois, qui brûlant de connoître ce poète célèbre autrement que par des observations générales sur sa personne et sur ses écrits, me pressent de publier le sujet de quelques-unes de ses meilleures pièces. Je ne regrette point le tems que ce dessein m'a fait mettre à les relire <sup>5</sup>. "

Prévost was entirely correct in calling No. CXCV of the *Pour et Contre* a translation from the English, for it is possible to locate the original source. In his study of Shakespear,

1. V. Schröder, " l'Abbé Prévost journaliste, " *Revue du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1914), pp. 136-37.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. *PG.*, XIV, 25.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Prévost used Rowe's edition, probably the second, which appeared in 1714, and which the Abbé called "la plus répandue <sup>1</sup>." From this edition, or from the first of 1709-10, he obtained his information and the greater part of his opinions. It is this work which contains the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," translated by the editor of the *Pour et Contre*, Prévost.

This edition offered three different sources of information with regard to Shakespear: Rowe's essay entitled "Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespear <sup>2</sup>," Gildon's "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England <sup>3</sup>," and finally his "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear <sup>4</sup>." The first essay, the one written by Rowe, is the source of the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," that is to say, the source of that number of the *Pour et Contre* so often invoked as proof of the breadth of view, even of the Anglomania, of Prévost. At the end of this same number a short passage (pp. 47-48) is indicated by Prévost himself as being taken from Gildon's first essay, though Prévost gives only the title and not the author's name <sup>5</sup>. The "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear" were of great help to Prévost in the preparation of the following number, the last of the two which were specially devoted to Shakespear. Even there, where we do find some of Prévost's own opinions, the plot analyses are translated from Gildon.

To sum up the results of a detailed study of these two numbers of the *Pour et Contre*, we find that the originality of Prévost in this criticism on Shakespear, enthusiastically praised as it has been, seems of the slightest: in one whole number the Abbé openly limits himself to giving only the *English* point of view — and this, once it is examined, proves to be almost

1. PC., XIV, p. 50.

2. Nicholas Rowe, *Shakespear's Works* (1709), I, pp. i-xl.

3. Rowe, *op. cit.*, VII (1710), pp. i-lxvii.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-444.

5. PC., XIV, p. 47, note (a).



wholly that of Rowe ; in the second number he is almost always very near to Gildon in thought if not in language. On *Hamlet* the Abbé has nothing of value, and the little he does say is entirely in the spirit of his contemporaries, Voltaire included. *The Tempest* does not please him. *Othello* is criticized in the conventional way, although Prévost does go so far as to admit that the play was successful in spite of the rules, comparing it in this regard with the *Cid* ; this perhaps is a discreet suggestion of a liking for *Othello*, but we cannot be sure. In any case, Prévost figures as but a timid advocate rather than as an "Anglomaniac" or as an enthusiastic "champion." Only the *Merry Wives* seems to evoke a really personal admiration, but even that is expressed in the vaguest and most general terms.

Prévost's position is midway between that of the more enthusiastic among the English and that of the hostile French. In all essential matters he is not far from the feeling of Gildon, more reserved than Rowe. Gildon thought that "Shakespear is indeed stor'd with a great many beauties, but they are in a heap of rubbish<sup>1</sup>." Prévost appears sometimes timid and hesitating in his opinions. Those which he acknowledges as his own show that he was much less in advance of the spirit of his time than has been thought. He remains, in short, very much an eighteenth-century Frenchman in his taste, very much a classicist. Occasionally, however, this classicism seems to tend cautiously toward greater liberality of viewpoint. The information that he gave — no less valuable because it was translated — and his moderation were of real service to the cause of Shakespear in France. For that he should receive his due meed of praise. Finally, it should be remembered that he was always a journalist, not a scholar, that he was obliged to write rapidly in order to live, and should be judged accordingly.

1. Gildon, *Remarks*, p. 425.

## CHAPTER VIII

## PRÉVOST AND ADDISON

Throughout the *Pour et Contre*, Addison (usually written, probably as an indication of pronunciation, "Addisson") is frequently mentioned. The attitude of the French critic is the one to be expected, considering the wide popularity which Addison had enjoyed in France for nearly twenty years <sup>1</sup>. Prévost refers to him as "le sage Addisson <sup>2</sup>," "le célèbre auteur du Spectateur <sup>3</sup>," "l'illustre Anglois <sup>4</sup>," "ce grand homme <sup>5</sup>," "l'incomparable Addisson <sup>6</sup>," "le sage et judicieux Addisson <sup>7</sup>," "l'illustre Addisson <sup>8</sup>," etc.: all of which indeed is hardly literary criticism but only the expression of the common attitude. Addison is frequently cited in one connection or another, his opinion being regarded of course as authoritative <sup>9</sup>. A case in point is a reference to Dryden's *All for Love* as "une des meilleures pièces de Dryden," and in the notes: "Au jugement de M. Addisson; et c'est tout dire <sup>10</sup>." Addison is likewise invoked in support of the statement that the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was the cause of the introduction into English poetry of an "elegance" and

1. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, p. 23, speaks of the vogue of the *Spectator* in France. Before 1728 there were at least eight editions of the 1716 translation.

2. PC., XVI, 30.

3. *Ibid.*, XV, 204.

4. *Ibid.*, XII, 4.

5. *Ibid.*, I, 47.

6. *Ibid.*, IX, 115.

7. *Ibid.*, II, 68.

8. *Ibid.*, XI, 86.

9. The Abbé du Bos as early as 1719 cites Addison frequently. So does the Abbé Le Blanc in his *Lettres d'un François* (1743). Telleen observes pp. 24-25: "On peut presque avancer qu'Addison était un critique français. Ses jugements étaient acceptés hors de sa patrie."

10. PC., VII, 122.

a "charm" previously non-existent <sup>1</sup>, and Prévost cites some verses by Lord Chesterfield in support of the contention <sup>2</sup>. The opinion does little honor to Prévost's judgment, but he will do better later. In one place he speaks of the respect of the English for Addison as being "affoibli <sup>3</sup>," but it is evidently only a passing shadow, for he does not refer to it again nor does his own tone change later.

The references to the *Spectator* are brief. The work was too well known to need discussion. The Sir Roger de Coverly series is called Addison's favorite production and the anecdote is related of the reasons that led the author to bring it to an end with the narrative of the baronet's death <sup>4</sup>. In fact Addison did not want a reworking of his favorite character by an inferior hand and took this effective precaution to prevent it. The fundamental moral purpose of the *Spectator* is implied as follows: "C'étoit une fort bonne méthode que celle d'Addison pour déraciner les mauvais usages et les modes extravagantes. Il les représentoit sous toutes les faces qui pouvoient en faire apercevoir le ridicule <sup>5</sup>." Another passage speaks of Addison as the "ennemi du vice <sup>6</sup>."

An interesting comment in the light of a reference of Prévost's to Montaigne already noted <sup>7</sup> is the following: "Il est certain, comme Addison l'observe dans un de ses plus beaux *Spectateurs*, qu'il y a plus de plaisir à tirer de l'imagination que de l'entendement <sup>8</sup>." With this dictum in mind we are sure that Prévost means to be rather independent of the French rules.

It was to be expected that a Frenchman would like a drama so classical in form as Addison's *Cato* <sup>9</sup>. Prévost does, and in

1. PC., I, 239.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 264.

3. *Ibid.*, IX, 117 margin.

4. *Ibid.*, I, 47-48.

5. *Ibid.*, XIV, 337.

6. *Ibid.*, XI, 86.

7. *Supra*, pp. 36-37.

8. PC., XX, 317.

9. So Le Blanc wrote (Vol. III, p. 131): "Vous connoissez, Monsieur,

fact he refers to it as "une des plus belles tragédies angloises<sup>1</sup>." He is much less Voltairian in his taste, however, when he mentions with approval the line, "Eternity, thou pleasing dreadful thought<sup>2</sup>," and when he selects for translation the following :

Through what new scenes and changes must we pass ?

The wide, th'unbounded prospect lies before us,

But clouds, shadows, and darkness rest upon it.

Here will I hold ; if there is a power above us,

(And that there is all Nature cries aloud

Through all her works) He must delight in virtue :

And that which he delights in, must be happy<sup>3</sup>.

This is not a typically French eighteenth-century attitude, although it is not entirely absent from the French spirit in general.

Addison's Remarks on Italy come in for rather judicious praise, though somewhat greater than would be given now. The estimate besides is not given as Prévost's own but is quoted from the *Voyages de M. de Breval*. However, Prévost tacitly accepts the judgment. Of Addison's classical allusions Breval says : " Il y a rapporté avec autant d'érudition que d'élégance, toutes les connoissances qu'il avoit puisées dans la lecture des Anciens, et surtout dans celle des auteurs classiques<sup>4</sup>." The remark is especially accurate, the parts where Addison's wanderings led him directly on the path of classical literature being by all odds the best, though his method is very much out of date now.

le Caton de M. Addison, une des tragédies qui fait le plus d'honneur au théâtre anglois. " Voltaire, addressing Bolingbroke in the *Discours sur la tragédie* (*Œuvres*, II, p. 322), calls it " cette tragédie, la seule bien écrite d'un bout à l'autre chez votre nation, à ce que je vous ai entendu dire à vous-même," and in the *Lettres philosophiques* (Vol. II, p. 85) he says that " le Caton de Mr. Addison me paroît le plus beau personnage qui soit sur aucun théâtre," and (pp. 84-85) calls the author " le premier Anglais qui ait fait une pièce raisonnable et écrite d'un bout à l'autre avec élégance. "

1. PC., VII, 60.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 356, note (a).

3. *Ibid.*, VII, 60, note (a).

4. *Ibid.*, XVI, 252.

Naturally the Campaign, the poem which first secured Addison his fame, is given special mention. The famous comparison of Marlborough to an Angel of the Lord is translated by Prévost and approved by him as "effectivement nouvelle, et d'un tour fort heureux <sup>1</sup>," and he adds in a note: "M. Addison réussit presque toujours heureusement dans ces sortes de figures. En voici une autre qu'on admire beaucoup dans sa belle tragédie de Caton. Sempronius témoigne à Porcius qu'il seroit au comble du bonheur, s'il pouvoit obtenir en mariage sa sœur Marcia: "Hélas Sempronius! lui dit l'autre, peux-tu penser "parler d'amour à Marcia, tandis que la vie de son père est en "danger? Il vaudroit autant caresser une Vestale tremblante, "lorsqu'elle voit le feu sacré prêt d'expirer <sup>2</sup>."

It seems that Prévost is attracted by the element of boldness and originality in the two figures. He is evidently not in any way alarmed by them as a more conservative Frenchman might have been. The second is nearer classic taste than the other and might have been accepted by a Frenchman of the seventeenth century, but the first would have been condemned by Boileau as a literary ornament taken from Christianity. Such observations as Prévost makes on Addison are much more concrete and definite than the few generalities he permits himself on Shakespear. The fact is probably indicative of greater familiarity with and liking for the more classical author.

## CHAPTER IX

### PRÉVOST AND DRYDEN

In his Letter on Tragedy, Voltaire wrote: "Voici encore un passage d'un fameux tragique anglais, Dryden poète du tems de Charles Second, auteur plus fécond que judicieux,

1. PC., I, 341.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-43, note (a).



qui auroit une réputation sans mélange, s'il n'avoit fait que la dixième partie de ses ouvrages, et dont le grand défaut est d'avoir voulu être universel <sup>1</sup>. " There follows a translation of a short passage from *Aureng Zeb*, Act IV, scene 1. As criticism, all this is anything but specific, which of course was to be expected in a work where brevity was so essential. In the first volume of the *Pour et Contre*, as we have already seen, Prévost resumes Voltaire's estimate, but without comment so far as Dryden is concerned<sup>2</sup>. Later, however, he gives considerable space to the English poet.

One of the experiments Prévost tried for a time in his *Pour et Contre* was to put some of his literary opinions into the mouths of two characters imagined for the purpose. Here probably we see the influence of the *Spectator*. One of these characters was an " ancien avocat du Temple Bar " particularly favorable to French literature; the other was a young English " ministre " whose leanings were decidedly toward the authors of his own country. In this way Prévost hoped to vary his method with success and at the same time to insure the giving of due space to both the " Pour " and the " Contre. " But apparently he soon tired of it. At any rate the expedient was abandoned after a few numbers.

One of the first authors to be treated in this way was Dryden. It is the Minister who speaks and Prévost later accepts his opinions as his own. After referring to Dryden's " belle tragédie de *Cléopâtre*, " he continues: " Toute l'Angleterre couroit aux représentations de la pièce de Dryden, et depuis Shakespear on n'avoit point vu d'exemple d'un succès si brillant. En effet, mille beautés qui sont répandues dans cette tragédie doivent la faire regarder comme un chef-d'œuvre. Elle plairoit même sur les théâtres de France<sup>3</sup>, puisqu'avec toutes les perfections

1. *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 83.

2. PC., I, 284.

3. The Abbé Le Blanc wrote (Vol. III, pp. 131-32, note m) : " *Tout pour l'amour ou le Monde bien perdu* . . . est de tous les ouvrages dramatiques de ce poëte, celui où il a mis le plus d'art, et c'est une des

que les Français recherchent, elle n'a pas certains ornemens de notre usage qu'ils appellent des défauts, quoique nous soyons bien éloignés de leur donner le même nom. Quelques François qui se trouvoient à Londres entreprirent, avec une connoissance fort médiocre de notre langue, de faire la critique d'un ouvrage si applaudi. Leur censure tomboit particulièrement sur une des scènes dont le poète avoit recueilli le plus de gloire. Marc Antoine s'étant retiré à Alexandrie après la bataille d'Actium, Dryden feint qu'Octavie son épouse va le trouver de la part d'Auguste, et qu'elle vient à bout de le déterminer à quitter Cléopâtre. Ce changement dura peu, et le retour d'Antoine vers sa maîtresse le précipita bientôt dans sa ruine. Mais tandis qu'Octavie se croit triomphante, et qu'elle est enflée du succès de sa négociation, elle cherche l'occasion de voir sa rivale, pour insulter à sa défaite, et se vanger de tous les chagrins qu'elle a reçus d'elle. C'est cette entrevue que les critiques françois trouvoient insupportable, et aussi contraire, dans Octavie, à la modestie de son sexe qu'à la grandeur d'âme d'une Romaine. Ils reprochoient à l'auteur de prêter aux deux rivales le langage des Halles, et à la nation de marquer un fort mauvais goût dans ses applaudissemens. On en jugera mieux par la lecture même de cette scène <sup>1</sup>."

The translation follows<sup>2</sup>. It is a translation which is close enough to the original to show that Prévost's knowledge of the language was good. As would be expected in translating poetry into prose, paraphrases and circumlocutions are frequent. The rendering is rather timid than bold, which is not surprising, given the conservative character of the French language at the time. It simply shows that Prévost, as a journalist, was rather following the taste of the time than leading

meilleures tragédies du théâtre anglois, elle est traduite dans le *Pour et Contre* de M. l'Abbé Prévôt." Cf. Vol. III, p. 173, note (b), for an unfavorable estimate.

1. PC., V, 33-35.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-40.

it. " When he grew weary of *that household clog*<sup>1</sup>, " is weakened to " lorsqu'il s'est trouvé fatigué de *votre mauvaise humeur*. " " You have long been practised in *that lascivious art* ? " becomes " vous êtes accoutumée depuis longtemps au *métier*, " which is a rather " familiar " expression and a bit brutal, but much more vague and general than the original. " Dost thou not blush to own *those black endearments*, that make sin pleasing ? " is translated : " Ne rougis-tu pas d'avouer *ces charmes détestables* qui font trouver du plaisir dans le crime ? " Prévost himself, as we shall see, was perfectly conscious of the fact that the English was much more forceful and expressive; we may give him credit for having felt the strength of the language even if he did not dare try to render it in French. His desire to avoid shocking " les honnêtes gens " is evident here as in his own novels. It is not a title to blame, only we must recognize it as one more indication that he was not a " born heretic " in literary matters, but sufficiently conservative after all.

In commenting on the scene translated, the Minister says : " Voilà, Monsieur, une des plus fameuses scènes de Dryden, par la querelle dont elle fut la cause; et si vous m'en demandiez mon sentiment, j'ajouterois malgré la critique, une des plus belles. Je me suis étonné mille fois qu'un homme aussi raisonnable que ce poète ait pris le parti de se défendre par des injures, contre une accusation à laquelle le succès même de sa pièce<sup>2</sup> lui fournissoit une réponse naturelle. Il devoit dire aux critiques françois; j'ai suivi nos mœurs et nos usages. Vous ne le sentez point parce que vous êtes remplis du préjugé des vôtres : mais tous mes compatriotes le sentent, et c'est par cette raison qu'ils applaudissent. Je suis dans les bornes

1. *All for Love*, Act III, line 425.

2. *Ibid.*, lines 427-28.

3. *Ibid.*, lines 443-44.

4. Cf. the confidence of Du Bos in the judgment of the crowd, and also Voltaire's very liberal " il est impossible que toute une nation se trompe en fait de sentiment, et ait tort d'avoir du plaisir ", in his *Essai sur la poésie épique*, quoted *supra*, p. 63. "

de la simple nature, ou du moins de ce qui passe pour tel en Angleterre. Il nous paroît naturel qu'Octavie, fière de sa conquête, cherche Cléopâtre pour triompher d'elle, et que celle-ci, se voyant attaquée, ait aussi assez de fierté pour ne pas disparaître devant sa rivale. Or suivant nos idées, deux personnes, si odieuses l'une à l'autre, ne pouvoient se traiter avec plus de ménagement ; car si l'une étoit Romaine et l'autre Reine d'Égypte, elles ne laissoient pas toutes deux d'être femmes<sup>1</sup>. " Prévost adds after the Minister's " letter " : " J'aurai soin... de ne rien approuver qui ne soit conforme aux principes de religion, de bienséance et de vérité qui sont établis parmi nous. Il ne me paroît pas jusqu'à présent qu'il s'en soit écarté, ni dans ses réflexions, ni dans ses promesses<sup>2</sup>. " This is sufficiently explicit and we have every right to regard the opinions just expressed as Prévost's own. The use of the Minister as a cloak shows his caution about giving expression to such liberal views in France, but it is important not to overlook the fact that he here none the less attacks directly the French idea of the absoluteness of their rules of taste, and tells his countrymen that they are " remplis de préjugé. " " La simple nature<sup>3</sup>, " is the true criterion, not artificial conceptions of what is due the modesty of woman and the " grandeur d'âme d'une Romaine. " Prévost here acknowledges with Fontenelle that " l'antiquité est un objet d'une espèce particulière ; l'éloignement le grossit<sup>4</sup>. " We shall see later more exactly just what his attitude is toward the Ancient and Modern controversy.

Note that this enlightened criticism of Dryden is of 1734,

1. PC., V, 40-41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

3. Of course it is dangerous to try to prove anything by the use of the word " nature," always invoked and often in widely different senses. The seventeenth century classicists used it and meant one thing ; the romanticists, and meant another. Still it seems impossible here from the context to think that it did not in this case mean a definite effort toward realism, and the " natural " as we now use the term, psychologically true, not weakened to conform to the classic " bienséances. "

4. Fontenelle, " Dialogue de Socrate et de Montaigne, " *Œuvres*, 1825, Vol. III, p. 424.

the year of Voltaire's summary *ex cathedra* pronouncement, and was perhaps provoked by it. Prévost's criticism created a demand for the translation of some more scenes, and this demand he was not slow to satisfy<sup>1</sup>. In order to give a fairer and more complete idea of English drama than he had yet done, he decided to translate the whole<sup>2</sup> of the play of which he had already given some scenes. Dryden's *All for Love* was in fact particularly suitable to give the French a relatively favorable idea of English drama, not only because it was one of the author's best plays, but also because it observed the unity of place as Shakespear's *Antony and Cleopatra* had not done. In his translation Prévost felt it necessary to tone down some of the figures as being too bold for the French, and apologized for the inevitable loss of beauty and expressiveness involved. In order to make his meaning clear, he illustrated by an example. He says : " Je dois faire remarquer à l'avantage des Anglois, que soit par le caractère particulier de leur langue, soit plutôt par la hardiesse de ses figures, le style poétique de leur théâtre est incomparablement plus fort que celui du nôtre. Ainsi dans quelque exactitude que je pusse rendre la pensée du poète, je ne me flatterois jamais de pouvoir atteindre à certaines beautés qui charment les spectateurs de Londres, et qui ne charment qu'eux. Elles sont si propres à leur langue, qu'eux-mêmes peut-être ils cesseroient de les admirer dans la nôtre. Un exemple servira mieux à me faire entendre. On se souvient que dans une scène du premier acte, le belliqueux Ventidius verse quelques larmes. J'ai beaucoup altéré ses expressions ; les voici, avec la traduction littérale.

" Look, emperor ! this is no common dew,  
I have not wept this forty year ; but now

1. " Ce n'est pas pour le seul plaisir de voir le théâtre couvert de morts, comme on s'y attend dans une catastrophe anglaise " (repeating the almost unfailing observation of his predecessors). " On voudroit sçavoir quel caractère et quel air les Anglois donnent aux Romains sur leur théâtre, et cette curiosité mérite d'être satisfaite. " PC., VI, 151-52.

2. PC., VII, 123-44; 146-68 ; 170-240.



My mother comes afresh into my eyes ;  
I cannot help her softness <sup>1</sup>. "

" Regarde, Empereur, ceci n'est pas rosée commune. Je n'ai pas pleuré de quarante ans. Mais à ce moment, ma mère revient dans mes yeux. je ne puis empêcher son attendrissement <sup>2</sup>. "

Before, on page 137, he had given the free translation :

" Mon Empereur ! Voyez ce qui sort de mes yeux. Il y a quarante ans que je n'ai versé de pleurs. Mais toute la tendresse de mon enfance renaît dans mon cœur. Je ne puis les arrêter. "

Prévost's appreciation of the distinctive character of the English language is very just. It is evident too that it is not lack of knowledge which prevents him from giving always the close translation. In fact, to render more fully the life of the original would hardly be possible until after the Romantic revolution had given back to the French language some of its liberty and color lost in the seventeenth <sup>3</sup> and eighteenth centuries.

The famous lyrical ode, *Alexander's Feast*, or *The Power of Musique*, written by Dryden for St. Cecilia's festival in 1697, was also translated by Prévost. " Veut-on lire un chef-d'œuvre de nos voisins, et goûter du moins une partie du plaisir qu'il a causé dans sa langue naturelle ? Il faut commencer par se défaire du préjugé national, et croire un moment que le bon goût de la poésie n'est pas borné à la France. Ensuite passant sur la différence des mœurs, et calculant ce que les meilleures choses perdent dans une traduction de vers en prose, on sera à peu près dans la disposition que je demande <sup>4</sup>. "

The important thing in all this criticism is again the urging of the necessity of ridding one's self of all national prejudice and of the feeling that good taste is limited to France alone.

1. Act I, lines 261-64.

2. PC., VII, 143-46.

3. Especially in the second half of the seventeenth century.

4. PC., XI, 49.

Prévost is strongly impregnated with a sense of the relativity of all canons of taste.

His estimate of Dryden is by no means complete, nor does it attempt to be. In comparison, however, with Voltaire's summary judgment, it is most instructive and, within its limits, accurate.

## CHAPTER X

### PRÉVOST AND MILTON

Milton was already quite well known in France before Prévost went to England at all. He himself in 1731 wrote in the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* : " Je ne parle point de Milton et de Spenser dont les grands noms sont connus partout où l'on connaît les belles lettres <sup>1</sup>. " This familiarity with Milton had, however, only very recently extended to include his poetry. In the seventeenth century Milton had become widely known in France as a dangerous political writer who had defended Cromwell and attacked the established order of government <sup>2</sup>. Only when the danger of the English Republic no longer threatened monarchical Europe did Milton become famous as a poet. The first to speak worthily of Milton to the French was Bayle, but even he considered him as primarily a prose writer <sup>3</sup>. Between 1728 and 1730 several publications revealed him to the public with *éclat* <sup>4</sup>. In 1729 appeared the first translation <sup>5</sup>, a poetic version which, while not exact, may still be read with pleasure, and which at the time was exceedingly popular. At least two editions appeared within a

1. *Œuvres*, II, 282.

2. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, p. 14.

3. Cf. Prévost's own hostile attitude toward Cromwell as manifested in *Cléveland*. Cf. also Comminges' document, already cited and showing the conception of Milton as a dangerous political revolutionist.

4. Telleen, p. 11.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

single year and from then to the end of the century there were no less than twenty<sup>1</sup>.

The first time Prévost speaks of Milton beyond a bare mention of his name, he does so in defense of his own notable preference for blank verse. "Je crois qu'il seroit à souhaiter qu'un de nos meilleurs poètes prît la peine de composer un poème complet sans rimes, et qu'en y employant toutes ses forces, au risque d'être mal récompensé par ses contemporains, il se contentât pendant sa vie, comme Milton, de la gloire d'être entré le premier dans une route nouvelle. Je suis persuadé que quelque jugement qu'on pût porter aujourd'hui de son ouvrage, tôt ou tard le tems lui feroit rendre la justice qu'il mériteroit. C'est précisément ce qui est arrivé à Milton, à qui l'Angleterre a dressé des autels, après l'avoir laissé cinquante ans dans l'oubli<sup>2</sup>." Voltaire also at times showed himself favorable to blank verse. On the part of Prévost at least there seems to have been the vague consciousness that French poetry was sick; that in comparison with the best in English poetry it was cold and formal<sup>3</sup>. His remedy is less certain than his diagnosis.

Later Prévost speaks of Milton more at length. This time it is to regret in the first place that the *Life of Milton* by Toland — his source as it had previously been Bayle's — has not yet been translated. He criticises both Milton and Saumaise for the violence of their quarrel, a criticism very much to be expected from the ever restrained and courteous Prévost, and goes on to a defense of Milton's knowledge of Latin, though it is by no means a defense without reservations<sup>4</sup>. Then he turns to his poetry. "Pour ce qui regarde sa poésie, Dryden admirant le poème du *Paradis perdu*, a jugé que la Grèce, l'Italie et l'Angleterre ont produit trois poètes en différens siècles, Homère, Virgile, et Milton : que le premier excelle par la sublimité de

1. Telleen, pp. 27-28.

2. PC., X, 253.

3. But cf. *infra*, Chapter xvii.

4. PC., XII, 128-30.

ses pensées, le second par la majesté, et que la nature ne pouvant aller au-delà avoit formé le troisième par l'assemblage de toutes les perfections des deux autres. C'est le sujet d'une épi-gramme de Dryden que M. Toland a insérée dans la Vie de son héros ; et je fais cette remarque pour l'opposer à celle de M. de Voltaire, qui a prétendu que le poème de Milton étoit peu estimé en Angleterre avant que le suffrage du Docteur Atterbury et de Mylord Bullingbrock l'eût fait sortir de l'obscurité <sup>1</sup>. " Dryden's celebrated pronouncement on Milton had already been cited in France : namely, in the 1715 edition of Bayle's Dictionary <sup>2</sup>. Worth noting, however, is Prévost's purpose in repeating it. Evidently it had been pretty well forgotten, else Voltaire would not have made the claim which Prévost hastens to correct, as much no doubt for the pleasure of doing so and of finding Voltaire in error as for that of establishing the rectification itself. In the same passage there is a curious estimate of Milton as " un de ces esprits satyriques, qui se plaisent à recueillir tous les bruits qui courent au désavantage d'autrui <sup>3</sup>. " He is also spoken of as having died " sans attachement pour aucune religion <sup>4</sup>, " which of course needs no comment. In his treatment of various English authors, Prévost mingles with his more serious criticism anecdotes and historical facts of unequal value. There is as much of the chronicler about him as of the literary critic, and always very much of the journalist entertaining his public as well as instructing it.

Later in the same passage Prévost makes interesting mention of the less known Samson, and the quotation shows again his liking for figures that are original and striking. " On remarque, " he says, " dans le *Samson Agonistes* de Milton une manière de s'exprimer sur le malheur d'être aveugle, qui est d'une force extraordinaire, et qui ne seroit peut-être

1. PC., XII, 130-31.

2. Telleen, p. 6.

3. PC., XII, 129-30.

4. *Ibid.*, XII, 134.

jamais venue à l'esprit d'un poète qui auroit eu les yeux meilleurs que Samson. " Quoi, " fait-il dire à ce héros israélite, " je suis condamné à vivre perpétuellement dans les ténèbres? " Je suis privé du plaisir de voir; du plus doux de tous les " plaisirs, et du plus grand de tous les biens! Toi, ciel, qui " as tout ordonné avec tant de sagesse, pourquoi attacher " un trésor aussi précieux que la vue à des organes aussi " foibles que les prunelles? *Pourquoi ta toute puissance n'a-t-elle pas fait que nous pussions voir par tous les pores, " comme elle a voulu que nous pussions sentir par tous les " fibres?* " Cette pensée est véritablement d'un aveugle <sup>1</sup>. " The translation is a free one. The English reads :

Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?  
 The Sun to me is dark  
 And silent as the Moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.  
 Since light so necessary is to life,  
 And almost life itself, if it be true  
 That light is in the soul,  
 She all in every part, *why was the sight*  
*To such a tender ball as the eye confined,*  
*So obvious and so easy to be quenched,*  
*And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,*  
*That she might look at will through every pore?* <sup>2</sup>

Prévost's translation weakens the text very much and departs unnecessarily from it. It is to be regretted that the comparison to the moon is omitted. Yet the last figure is forceful and beautiful, and Prévost, in giving it, shows that he does have a certain appreciation for the original side of English poetry.

Prévost's estimate of Milton is then in the main just. It does not attempt to be complete in any sense of the word, and from that point of view it is disappointing. In part this incompleteness may be due to the fact that the public

1. PC, XII, 135.

2. *Samson Agonistes*, lines 85-97.



hardly needed so much to be instructed about Milton as about many other English writers. I get the impression also — though this is something which cannot be demonstrated — that Prévost himself enjoyed his Milton only moderately after all. Certainly he considered him a great poet and a champion of blank verse, but it seems that the Abbé follows rather too closely Toland and Dryden to permit us to regard him as an enthusiastic admirer on his own account of the English poet.

## CHAPTER XI

### PRÉVOST AND POPE

Pope became famous in England with the publication of *An Essay on Criticism* in 1711. This was translated into French verse by Hamilton in 1713, but the translation remained unpublished <sup>1</sup>. In 1717 appeared a translation by Robeton at Amsterdam <sup>2</sup>. The same year *Le Journal littéraire de la Haye* published its *Dissertation sur la poésie angloise* in which Pope, along with Dryden, is compared to Boileau, a comparison repeated, so far as Pope and Boileau are concerned, by Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* <sup>3</sup>. In 1728 the *Rape of the Lock* was translated by Mme. de Caylus, and retranslated by Desfontaines in 1738. The Abbé Du Resnel published in 1730 at Paris a verse translation of the *Essay on Criticism* <sup>4</sup>. Voltaire, in a letter of February 20, 1769, to M. de Thibouville, claimed to have composed half of the verses attributed to Du Resnel <sup>5</sup>. Thus, before Prévost wrote, readers in France had already had the opportunity to become

1. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 144. Cf. PC., IX, 327.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Lettre sur les Académies* (No. 24).

4. Lanson, *op. cit.*, II, p. 143.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

familiar with Pope's *Essay on Criticism* and with the *Rape of the Lock*. This explains the fact that in the first volume of the *Pour et Contre* Prévost can refer casually to Pope as to one already generally known in France <sup>1</sup>.

In 1734 Prévost announces the appearance of the *Essay on Man*. " Il paroît depuis peu à Londres un beau poème *sur la nature et l'état de l'homme, considéré par rapport au bonheur*. C'est la quatrième partie d'un ouvrage commencé il y a déjà quelques mois sous le titre d'*Essay on Man*. On l'attribue à M. Pope. Il est digne de lui; mais je ne sçais si la querelle éclatante que M. Pope vient d'avoir avec Mylord Harrey est digne de l'auteur d'un si bel ouvrage... Pour nous expliquer avec sincérité, la différence est extrême entre les ouvrages qui viennent de la colère de M. Pope, et ceux qui sont le fruit de sa raison et de ses admirables talens <sup>2</sup>. " This passage shows very well the admirable way in which Prévost preserves his balance. While praising highly the *Essay on Man*, he is in no way blinded to Pope's frequent lack of dignity and self-control. The closing sentence of the paragraph is, for a contemporary, extraordinary. A modern critic could sum up the situation no better than does Prévost. He shows admirable impartiality and a manner of expression which is at the same time accurate and courteous.

In 1735 the author of the *Pour et Contre* announced the publication of Pope's letters, " sans son aveu, " and praised them from the advance reports in circulation <sup>3</sup>, for he had not yet had the opportunity to inform himself at first hand. The reference to the supposed publication of the letters without Pope's consent is to a device of the author's own, for he even went through the form, as it appears, of having his publisher arrested. The apparent obstacle served, of course, as Prévost adds <sup>4</sup>, to increase the eagerness of the public to read the

1. PC., I, 118-19; 167.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 161-62.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 302-03.

4. *Ibid.*, 304.

book. The letters proved to be a disappointment. We know now that they had been doctored by Pope himself. The *Pour et Contre* says of them : " Les Lettres de M. Pope que j'annonçai il y a quelques semaines, ont réuni sur deux points les sentimens du public; le stile, dit-on, en est pur et agréable, et l'esprit y brille de toutes parts. Les critiques, qui ne se bornent point à louer ce qui est digne de l'être, prétendent que c'est aussi tout ce qu'il y faut chercher, et que cette multitude d'observations littéraires, d'anecdotes curieuses de la cour et de la ville, de principes et de réflexions utiles pour toutes les sciences et tous les arts, qu'on attendoit sur les premiers bruits qui s'en étoient répandus, se réduisent à des choses assez communes, ou qui ne méritent pas du moins de si beaux noms. Je me suis trouvé de l'opinion des critiques, après avoir lu l'ouvrage : mais soit que le public ne soit point capable en effet de se tromper <sup>1</sup>, soit que je me laisse séduire par son autorité, et que je me rende l'esclave de la règle que j'ai établie, rien n'est à mon gré si ingénieux et si bien écrit que les Lettres de M. Pope. J'ajoute qu'il y règne un certain feu qui le fait reconnoître pour poète, jusques dans les choses les plus simples et les plus communes. C'est comme le *trop plein* de ses poésies <sup>2</sup>. " Prévost then translates Pope's letter to Blount (January 21, 1715-16) on the death of Wycherley <sup>3</sup>. He continues : " En louant jusqu'à un certain point les Lettres de M. Pope, je ne puis m'empêcher d'observer que les plus agréables ne sont pas celles où il paroît qu'il a voulu l'être par une affectation de plaisanterie. Il est rare en effet qu'un génie aussi élevé que le sien s'abaisse sans contrainte jusqu'au badinage... Quelques traits d'une lettre badine de M. Pope vérifieront mes maximes <sup>4</sup>. " He translates " une lettre badine sur les chiens <sup>5</sup> " and " une lettre galante à

1. Du Bos's idea. He thought of his public as a limited one, however.

2. PC., VII, 292-93.

3. *Ibid.*, 294-97.

4. *Ibid.*, 297-98.

5. *Ibid.*, 298-302.

Mme M..., <sup>1</sup> " which sufficiently prove his point. However, he announces that he intends in a later number to give his readers the translation of " quelques-unes de ses plus sérieuses pensées sur quelque point de littérature ou de morale, et j'annonce d'avance qu'on y reconnaîtra l'auteur de *l'Essai sur l'Homme*, et de plusieurs ouvrages du même prix <sup>2</sup>. "

The reference to the " certain feu, " which characterizes the letters and makes the author's poetic genius evident even in his prose, is noteworthy because it shows that Prévost feels an enthusiasm for Pope in spite of his accurate criticism of his faults, and one is tempted to think that this enthusiasm is greater than it is for authors more characteristically English. The charge of affectation is also just, although Prévost applies it only to the affectation of pleasantry. A modern critic judges the letters as " wanting in naturalness and charm <sup>3</sup>. " Prévost would have accepted but half of the judgment.

Later the Abbé speaks of the " goût de l'ordre, de l'élégance, de la douceur et de l'harmonie " which the English have not yet attained completely, and continues : " M. Pope est sans contredit de tous les poètes anglois celui qui a fait les plus grands pas vers la perfection dont je parle, et peut-être que l'une des meilleures preuves qu'on en pourroit apporter, c'est que de toutes les poésies de sa nation il n'y en a point de si faciles à traduire en françois que les siennes <sup>4</sup>. "

The observation that Pope is the easiest of English poets to translate into French is evidently absolutely just, since Pope does himself represent the height of the French and the classical influence in England. English literature of the age was so markedly in accord with the spirit of French classicism that no more favorable time could have been imagined in which to introduce it into France. It is not

1. PC., VII, 302-06.

2. *Ibid.*, 306.

3. Professor Bensley in the *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. IX, p. 94.

4. PC., IX, 334-35.

to be overlooked that Prévost in this passage obviously has a strong preference for the orderly and harmonious over the lawless beauties more generally characteristic of English literature, and he considers the former qualities as the ideal to be attained. In this he was very much a Frenchman of his time. This is not a reproach, especially since we have already seen that he by no means excludes other, and freer, kinds of beauty. Only, it is well to observe his attitude here in order not to form a false conception of the degree to which he was given over to English romantic standards. In fact the ideals current in England at this time were not far from his own, and though one cannot deny that the immediate effect was narrowing, especially in regard to the attitude toward Shakespear, yet it is equally impossible to refuse to admit that French influence on English literature was in the long run beneficent and a necessary corrective to the excesses into which the successors of Shakespear, copying his faults but without his genius, fell. So Prévost's attitude is eminently just and is further evidence of the general saneness of his criticism.

As proof of the excellence of Dryden's *Feste d'Alexandre*, Pope's Essay on Criticism is invoked and a part of it cited and translated into prose <sup>1</sup>. Pope is evidently treated as an authority. The Abbé du Resnel's translation of the Essay on Man is preferred to that of the Essay on Criticism, partly because the subject matter itself seems less didactic <sup>2</sup>. In a later passage Prévost, while acknowledging the poetic qualities of Du Resnel's translations, praises the greater fidelity of those of M. de Seré. He then goes on to defend Pope in his usual sensible fashion against the charge of irreligion <sup>3</sup>. Characteristically, he avoids any philosophical discussion of the Essay on Man, but intervenes between Crouzas and Pope's English defender, Warburton, with a

1. PC., XI, 61.

2. *Ibid.*, XII, 23-24.

3. *Ibid.*, XVI, 238-39.



plain common-sense remark regarding Pope's persistent clinging to Catholicism even when his interests might well be better furthered by professing accord with the Church of England. The defense is just, though it fails to take into account the fact that Pope was in reality much nearer the deistic position than perhaps even he himself supposed <sup>1</sup>. Another passage refers to the same controversy <sup>2</sup>. A recurrence of the criticism of Pope's caustic temper is to be expected from what we know of Prévost's own admirable patience and self-control <sup>3</sup>.

The remarks on Pope are distinguished on the whole by a sense of just appreciation both of his merits and of his faults. As the English poet was still living during the whole period of the publication of the *Pour et Contre*, a more complete estimate of his genius could hardly be expected at a time when literary criticism was still so much in its infancy. Within its limits there could certainly be no fairer estimate. The whole does much credit to Prévost's impartiality, as, however, it also testifies to the essentially French character of his taste, mellowed though this was by an intelligent liberalism which was itself to a great extent an outgrowth of his inherent sense of fairness.

1. It is interesting to compare Rousseau's equally characteristic attitude toward this same matter. "M. de Crouzas vient de nous donner une réfutation des Epîtres de Pope, que j'ai lue avec ennui. Je ne sais pas au vrai lequel des deux auteurs a raison; mais je sais bien que le livre de M. de Crouzas ne fera jamais faire une bonne action, et qu'il n'y a rien de bon qu'on ne soit tenté de faire en quittant celui de Pope." *Nouvelle Héloïse*, seconde partie, lettre XVIII.

2. PC., XVI, 241-49.

3. *Ibid.*, 239.

## CHAPTER XII

## PRÉVOST AND SHAFTESBURY

" Tous les ouvrages de ce seigneur... consistent en morceaux détachés. C'est un des plus ingénieux et des plus agréables écrivains d'Angleterre <sup>1</sup>. "

" Mylord Shaftsbury, qui semble avoir connu mieux que personne le génie de sa nation, est d'un sentiment tout opposé [à celui de Voltaire]. En convenant que les tragédies angloises sont fort éloignées de la perfection, il n'attribue point le mal à d'autre cause qu'à la négligence des Anglois, dont la source, dit-il, est leur vanité. Ils reconnoissent, ajoute-t-il, en quoi ils manquent, mais ils ne veulent point prendre la peine qu'il faut pour être plus exacts. *Miscellaneous Reflexions*, pp. 258-59 <sup>2</sup>. "

Without here weighing the truth of Shaftesbury's observation, we can be content to note the esteem in which he is held by Prévost. Very great authority is accorded to him. He seems to have understood better than anyone else " le génie de sa nation. " *C'est beaucoup dire*.

This was by no means a mere passing opinion of Prévost, for he cites Shaftesbury frequently. Of Hamlet he says that it is a play, " où l'on ne trouve, " dit Mylord Shaftsbury, " no ranting at the gods, no blustering heroison, no adoration or flattery of the sex, nor anything of that curious mixture of the fierce and tender which makes the hinge of modern tragedy. " *Advice to an Author*, p. 276 <sup>3</sup>. " Here by implication Prévost puts himself on the side of the English author in admiring Hamlet, and again it is a point of issue with Voltaire. It is worth noting here that Prévost even abstains from quoting

1. PC., II, 34, note (b).

2. *Ibid.*, I, 284-85, note (a). The pagination in the fourth edition of Shaftesbury's works, Dublin, 1737-43, 3 vols., is the same as Prévost's.

3. *Ibid.*, I, 280, note (b). Cf. *supra*, Chapter vi, p. 53.

the part of Shaftesbury's previous page where certain reserves had been made in his admiration <sup>1</sup>. No doubt this is in part because in this particular instance the Abbé preferred to differ as much as possible from Voltaire, but it is probable also that he was willing to go as far as the English author in his admiration of Shakespear. Shaftesbury would not take him farther than a Frenchman of liberal tendencies would be able comfortably to go.

A part of Shaftesbury's *Miscellaneous Reflections* is translated <sup>2</sup>, but it has no bearing on literary criticism. One passage calls him "un écrivain célèbre <sup>3</sup>," and in another he stands, with Barrow, Newton, and Locke, as one of the four "Demi-Dieux anglois <sup>4</sup>."

It is not possible from these passages to determine the influence of Shaftesbury upon Prévost. It is evident that some influence must have existed, since Prévost's admiration is clearly great. Shaftesbury's classical training and tastes made him particularly easy for a Frenchman to admire, even a Frenchman of much less liberal mind than Prévost. Shaftesbury turns in fact by preference away from Shakespear, and to some extent also even from contemporary literature of his own country to the more rigid classicism of France <sup>5</sup>. One may well question whether, of the two, Prévost himself was not the more liberal spirit. It is certainly probable that

1. *Characteristicks*, Vol. I, 273. "Notwithstanding his natural rudeness, his unpolish'd style, his antiquated phrase and wit, his want of method and coherence, and his deficiency in almost all the graces and ornaments of this kind of writings; yet..., " etc.

2. PC., IV, 299-300.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 313.

4. *Ibid.*, IV, 78-79. Cf. PC., IV, 233, where he is mentioned with Milton, Shakespear, and Nassau as one of "ces quatre grands hommes." His opinion is cited also in PC., III, 54, and XVI, 235-36.

5. "Die englischen Dichter der nächsten Gegenwart, so sichtlich sie auch der französischen Regelmässigkeit zuschreiten, sind ihm doch noch immer nicht streng genug an Gesetz und Regel gebunden; in Shakespeare zumal sieht er nichts als tumultuarische Rohheit." Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, p. 176. But this last statement is evidently too strong, on the showing of the Hamlet passage above.

Englishmen like Shaftesbury, more or less French in their tastes, were very useful intermediaries in helping French critics to gain a not too unfavorable idea of English literature and in hastening its popularity in France. From that point of view it is very significant that Prévost accords him so important a position in English thought.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PRÉVOST AND STEELE

Addison, as we have seen, was already well known on the continent. In fact he was the first English dramatist sincerely admired in France <sup>1</sup>. The name of Steele of course was associated with his and with the translation of the *Spectator* which began to appear in 1714. *Le Babillard* (The Tatler), in which Steele had a more prominent part than in the *Spectator*, was translated by Armand de la Chapelle between 1723 and 1725 <sup>2</sup>. Already in 1715 certain *Œuvres diverses de Steele* had appeared in a single octavo volume. *Le Mentor moderne* (The Guardian) had been translated by Van Effen in 1723 <sup>3</sup>. Thus, in dealing with Steele also, Prévost was treating an author quite well known outside of England. Voltaire in the *Lettres philosophiques* had passed him by with a bare mention as one of the "bons poètes comiques" of England <sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless Prévost's contribution to the knowledge of Steele in France was to be by no means an unimportant one. Just as, in Dryden's *All for Love*, he had already offered his public the opportunity to read and judge for themselves one of England's best tragedies, so now in Steele's *Conscious Lovers* he givesthem a chance to enjoy one of the best comedies of

1. Jusserand, p. 62.

2. Lanson, *Manuel bibliographique*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Lettres philosophiques*, Vol. II, p. 109.

the time <sup>1</sup>. This translation is complete and runs through more than half of the eighth volume of the *Pour et Contre* <sup>2</sup>. It appeared in 1736. The wording of the statement <sup>3</sup> which Prévost made just before beginning the translation leaves a little doubt as to whether he was himself the author of it.

Significant is the following comment after the first act of the *Conscious Lovers*. "On a remarqué sans doute dans ce qu'on a lu jusqu'ici, plus d'ordre et de bienséance qu'on n'en attendoit dans une comédie angloise, et j'avoue que c'est un sujet d'étonnement pour moi, que sur les mêmes théâtres où l'on voit paroître tous les jours avec succès les bouffonneries les plus basses et les plus indécentes, on ait accordé tant d'applaudissemens à une pièce si exacte et si modeste. Il en faut conclure que ce n'est pas faute de goût que les Anglois tardent si longtems à épurer tout à fait leur théâtre, et que si leur pratique est encore inférieure à leurs idées, on ne doit peut-être en accuser que la tyrannie de l'habitude. Mais la suite de notre traduction justifiera encore mieux cette remarque <sup>4</sup>."

It was hardly by chance that Prévost chose to translate as examples of English tragedy and of English comedy two plays which, though very different from French drama, yet had undergone to some extent its influence, and hence were not so markedly in opposition to the prevailing classic rules. In introducing English literature to the French, Prévost proceeded with judgment and insinuated his views with tact. He

1. "... pour commencer ici la traduction d'une des plus belles comédies du théâtre anglois. Elle m'est demandée par ceux à qui la *Mort d'Antoine et de Cléopâtre* a fait souhaiter de connoître aussi le goût de nos voisins pour le genre comique. La pièce est regardée comme la meilleure de celles de M. Steele. Que la traduction soit de ma main ou de celle d'un autre, c'est ce qu'il y a de moins important, pourvu qu'elle soit bonne. Le titre est *The Conscious Lovers*, qu'on traduiroit fort bien en latin par *Conscii Amantes*, mais auquel je n'ai rien trouvé qui réponde mieux en françois que *l'Amour confident de lui-même*." PC., VIII, 108.

2. PC., VIII, 109-321.

3. Given *supra*, note 1.

4. PC., VIII, 186.



realized the danger of arousing hostility from the very beginning were he to choose plays too strikingly different from those sanctioned by prevailing French taste. It seems probable moreover that in the passage just cited he was doing more than merely putting himself tactfully in accord with his readers, and that he himself believed that many of the extravagances of the English theater ought to be curtailed by a reasonable adherence to the rules. Certainly the reference (so frequent under his pen) to the "bouffonneries les plus basses et les plus indécentes" was aimed directly at the excesses of the Restoration drama and of the plays more or less in the same style which still persisted in England, though they were gradually dying out under the influence of the warfare begun so notably by Jeremy Collier in 1698. Toward plays of that type Prévost's attitude is clear. It is not so much the irregularity of the English theater that he condemns here as its coarseness of taste. The same note recurs in his criticism of Swift. It seems that what he hopes to see on both sides of the Channel is a judicious mingling of the English and of the French rules of taste with avoidance of the excesses of both. The tendency is noticeable here, as elsewhere, to accord much more respect to the "bienséances" than was formerly supposed. Similarly Prévost likes to point out that after all the English are nearer the fold than his compatriots think; that it is only a question of time when they will follow the rules which they already esteem in theory. This is very much the position of Shaftesbury, though he, with less reason for having to be polite, explains on other grounds the delay in bringing about the reform.

A noteworthy passage is the following :

"A la réserve de quelques libertez nationales, et d'un petit nombre de fautes contre ce que nous nommons les règles, je ne vois rien dans toute la pièce qui ne puisse entrer en comparaison avec ce que notre théâtre a produit de plus estimé. Que le fond du sujet soit pris de Tércence, il ne seroit pas plus juste d'en faire un reproche à M. Steele que d'en faire un à

Térence d'avoir pris les siens de Ménandre. L'unité de lieu paroîtra blessée dans la plupart des scènes ; mais le raisonnement des Anglois en faveur de cet usage de leur théâtre est-il destitué de force et de vraisemblance ? Ils conviennent que c'est une chose monstrueuse que de faire passer en un moment l'œil du spectateur d'une partie du monde à l'autre, ou même du lieu présent de la scène à tout autre lieu dont la distance ne puisse s'accorder avec l'unité de l'action principale ; et sur ce principe ils ne balancent point à condamner Shakespear d'avoir mis sur la scène, dans une même pièce, le meurtre de Jules César à Rome et la mort de Brutus dans les champs de Philippes. Mais comme l'unique fondement de cette règle est l'égard raisonnable qu'on doit toujours à la vraisemblance, ils prétendent qu'elle n'est pas moins blessée par les bornes trop étroites auxquelles nos auteurs se réduisent ; car la raison, disent-ils, ne permet pas de supposer que neuf ou dix personnages qui sont en action pendant l'espace d'un jour ou d'environ vingt-quatre heures, se rencontrent ou se rejoignent toujours au même endroit lorsqu'ils ont quelque chose à démêler entr'eux. Il est bien plus naturel de les représenter dans tous les endroits où les différentes circonstances de l'intrigue ont dû les conduire, en aidant l'imagination et les yeux du spectateur par le changement subit des décorations, qui dépend de l'habileté des machinistes. Ainsi, dans la comédie qu'on vient de lire, la scène est tantôt chez M. Bevil, tantôt chez M. Seiland, tantôt au Parc de Saint James ou dans la maison d'Indiane, tantôt dans un lieu ouvert ou dans un lieu fermé ; et cette variété soulage bien plus l'imagination qu'elle ne la gêne, parce qu'elle répond en effet à la vérité des choses, qui doit être respectée comme la principale règle dans la conduite de toutes les pièces de théâtre. Où est l'imagination assez crédule pour se persuader que dans Phèdre, dans Bérénice, dans Mithridate, dans Britannicus, etc., tous les Acteurs, malgré la variété de leurs mouvemens et de leurs intérêts, se rencontrent à point nommé dans le même lieu, soit pour parler, soit pour agir ?

" Ces réflexions m'en ont fait naître d'autres ausquelles je regretterois de ne pouvoir donner place ici, si j'avois entrepris de justifier l'auteur anglois sur tous les points où il s'écarte de nos mœurs et de nos usages. Mais je le répète; ce n'est point à l'apologie de nos voisins que je me suis engagé dans le Pour et Contre. Je parle de leurs ouvrages, de leur goût, de leur caractère et de leurs coutumes, en simple historien qui veut les faire connoître, et faciliter au lecteur le moyen de les comparer avec les nôtres. C'est dans la même vue que j'entre souvent dans les mêmes détails sur tout ce qui nous regarde, parce que rien ne facilite tant les comparaisons que d'en rapprocher les termes <sup>1</sup>. "

Here we get a more precise pronouncement on what Prévost rather disparagingly refers to as " ce que nous nommons les règles <sup>2</sup>. " Equally condemned are the lawlessness of some of Shakespear's plays <sup>3</sup> and servile obedience to the rules of time and place even then current <sup>4</sup> on the French stage. Here

1. PC., VIII, 322-25.

2. Attacking probably the absoluteness and the dogmatism of the followers of the rules.

3. Gildon observed in his *Remarks on Shakespear's Plays* p. 347 : " It is not to be doubted that he would have given us far more noble plays if he had had the good fortune to have seen but any one regular performance of this nature. The beauty of order would have struck him immediately, and at once have made him more correct and more excellent. " The attitude of Prévost is not different.

4. D. Mornet, " La Question des règles au dix-huitième siècle. " *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 1914, pp. 249-50. " Les règles " de la poésie et de l'éloquence, disait Geoffroy en 1801, fondées sur la " nature, sont immuables comme elle. " Ce fut là le terme inébranlable où la plupart des critiques s'arrêtèrent. Tous ont cru qu'il y avait des règles littéraires précises. Il serait vain de poursuivre, de Desfontaines à la Harpe ou de Fréron à Geoffroy, la croyance fidèle à leur autorité...

" Népomucène Lemercier déterminera les vingt-six règles du genre tragique; les critiques du dix-huitième siècle les ont dénombrées moins exactement, mais leur respect fut aussi méthodique. Gaulluyer 1728 étudie le poème dramatique: Article I: De la fable; — Sec. I: Manière de faire une fable; — 2: des Episodes; — 3: de l'Action; — 4: de l'unité d'action dramatique; — 5: de la simplicité de l'action dramatique; — 6: de la continuité; — 7: de l'intégrité; — 8: de la vraisemblance; — 9: de l'unité de temps; — 10: de l'unité de lieu, etc. Soit plus de trois cents pages d'impératifs catégoriques. "

the last word has been said on the matter of the rules. The unity of the main action is made the test of whether the other unities are sufficiently observed or not, and "la vérité des choses" is the chief rule to be respected in the drama. What more remains to be said to-day? Prévost's liberalism consists, not in want of respect for the rules, but in the clear perception of the fact that it is the spirit, not the letter, which matters. He shows both intelligence and moderation; his balance and his poise distinguish him. It should not be forgotten that his statement comes nearly a hundred years before *Hernani*. It is true that in his time Frenchmen were beginning to call the rules in question. La Motte observes in 1725 that many authors fail "par une scrupuleuse affectation d'observer les règles <sup>1</sup>." Voltaire in the *Préface d'Œdipe* (1730) speaks of those who have loaded down "presque tous les arts d'un nombre prodigieux de règles, dont la plupart sont inutiles ou fausses <sup>2</sup>." If art "doit soumettre," Montesquieu admits also that there are times when "il doit être soumis <sup>3</sup>." But none the less, M. Mornet observes that "jusqu'à la fin du dix-huitième siècle la critique raisonnable ou philosophique reste donc la critique essentielle <sup>4</sup>." "Tous citent Boileau avec piété et restent dociles à ses méthodes <sup>5</sup>." Indications point already to the formation of historical criticism, point also toward impressionistic methods of judging, but these, particularly in the first half of the century, remain secondary. Thus we see that Prévost is with the party of progress, and he did not, like Voltaire, become reactionary afterwards. If others sporadically called the rules in question, none did so with more fairness and evenness of judgment than he. Note too that in taking his examples of the weakness of the conventional rules, he goes directly to their very best and most successful exponent,

1. Mornet, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Loc. cit.* Theoretically, Boileau also had admitted this principle.

4. Mornet, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

5. *Loc. cit.*

Racine <sup>1</sup>. Even in Racine, says Prévost, — and we know nevertheless that the works of Racine were among his three favorites <sup>2</sup>, — even in Racine there are offenses against probability: just as on the other hand in Shakespear. Thus he set over against each other the two greatest representatives of dramatic art in their respective countries, each diametrically opposed, neither without faults.

It is evident that Prévost desired to see introduced into the theater all reforms which would tend to greater "vraisemblance." In a later volume he translates at length some observations of Steele's which attack particularly monologues, asides, and all expositions made expressly for the spectators <sup>3</sup>.

One other passage treats of Steele. This speaks briefly of his work as a journalist. Of the Guardian, Prévost says: "En rendant justice à l'esprit et au sçavoir de l'auteur, on se trouve trop souvent refroidi par ses réflexions politiques, qui recommencèrent à devenir le goût de son tems <sup>4</sup>." This estimate is singularly precise and just, and is in accord with modern criticism. The Tatler and the Spectator are of course mentioned favorably.

As a whole, the observations on Steele are of particular importance. The discussion of the question of the rules is not to be surpassed and is exceptional for the time. In translating the Conscious Lovers entire, Prévost introduced into France a comedy, which, while not one of the greatest English masterpieces, is Steele's best dramatic work and had at the time certain aspects of especial interest. Its comparative regularity made it particularly suitable to win French approval; its satire is directed especially against duelling and marriages of

1. So Stendhal wrote his *Racine et Shakespear*.

2. The others were Fénelon's *Télémaque* and La Bruyère's *Caractères*. MHQ., I, 170.

3. PC., XII, 296-306. Cf. La Motte. Voltaire resisted the proposed innovations. Lanson, *Hist. de la litt. fr.*, p. 648.

Gildon takes much the same attitude as Steele. *Remarks on Shakespear*, pp. 353 ff.; p. 412.

4. PC., XIX, 299.



convenience ; the opposition between the hereditary gentry and the rising commercial class is portrayed clearly in the play ; Bevil represents Steele's idea of a gentleman, sincere and honorable on all occasions. Whether Prévost's aim in selecting this play was to attack existing abuses is not clear. It is possible at least. His general attitude leads one to suspect that the drama with a moral purpose was fitted to please him particularly, provided art was not too much sacrificed. However that may be, soon Diderot will write his bourgeois dramas, Rousseau will attack duelling and licentiousness. Consciously or unconsciously, Prévost is in the forward-current.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PRÉVOST AND SWIFT

Swift attracted the attention of French journalists before Prévost. " Ils aiment sa plaisanterie acérée et un peu grasse, son rire narquois, sa moquerie amère <sup>1</sup>. " Texte observes also that as early as 1713 *le Journal littéraire* announced several of his works and later published parts of Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub. In 1720 *la Bibliothèque anglaise* translated the Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue (Vol. VIII, Part I). The following year Van Effen translated and published at The Hague the Tale of a Tub, and finally, in 1727, Desfontaines translated Gulliver, which had appeared in England the previous year <sup>2</sup>. The same year Voltaire wrote of Swift to Thieriot : " C'est le Rabelais de l'Angleterre, comme je vous l'ai déjà mandé ; mais c'est un Rabelais sans fatras, et ce livre [Gulliver] serait amusant par lui-même, par ces imaginations singulières dont il est plein, par la légèreté de son style, quand il ne serait pas d'ailleurs la satire du genre humain <sup>3</sup>. " In

1. Texte, p. 34.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

3. Letter of February 2, 1727.

his treatment of the second part of Gulliver, however, observes M. Lanson, he qualified somewhat his praise <sup>1</sup>. In the *Lettres philosophiques* he speaks of the "ingénieux Docteur Suift, qu'on appelle le Rabelais d'Angleterre," and continues: "Il a l'honneur d'être prêtre comme Rabelais, et de se moquer de tout comme lui: mais on lui fait grand tort, selon mon petit sens, de l'appeller de ce nom"; but later: "M. Suift est Rabelais dans son bon sens, et vivant en bonne compagnie <sup>2</sup>; il n'a pas à la vérité la gaieté du premier, mais il a toute la finesse, la raison, le choix, le bon goût qui manque à notre Curé de Meudon. Ses vers sont d'un goût singulier et presque inimitable; la bonne plaisanterie est son partage en vers et en prose, mais pour le bien entendre, il faut faire un petit voiage dans son païs <sup>3</sup>." In our discussion of the *Lettres philosophiques* <sup>4</sup> we have already noted how Prévost criticized this exaggeration of Swift's "bon goût." The Abbé himself, however, falls somewhat into the same tendency when he mentions "M. le Doyen Swift, connu par la finesse et l'agrément de son esprit, et père d'une infinité de petits ouvrages qui portent ces deux caractères <sup>5</sup>." Prévost then goes on to give the narrative of an attack on Swift's life in Ireland <sup>6</sup>.

In Volume V of the *Pour et Contre* Prévost speaks of him as "le fameux Docteur Swift qui se plaint avec sa gayeté ordinaire du triste état où ses infirmités le réduisent <sup>7</sup>." The reference to "sa gayeté ordinaire" is typical and at the same time noteworthy. Prévost here, even less than Voltaire, who admitted that Swift lacked the gaiety of Rabelais, seems little to realize the bitter tragedy of Swift's life. The verses Prévost

1. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 142.

2. Has Voltaire been noting the frequent references in Swift's correspondence with Pope to the usquebaugh, which seemed to lie nearest his heart?

3. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, pp. 135-36.

4. *Supra*, Chapter vi.

5. PC., III, 57.

6. *Ibid.*, III, 57-62.

7. *Ibid.*, V, 267.

translates after the above passage are indeed far from gay. Only the last two lines have the slightest touch of humor, and that bitter enough, even when one remembers that Swift was not married and that these two lines are not then autobiographical, although the references to his deafness and giddiness are. As early as 1727 in fact his health was bad <sup>1</sup>, and he gradually grew worse. Hettner states : " Im Jahr 1736 fing er an, sein Gedächtniss zu verlieren... Seit dem Jahr 1740 verfiel er in einem Zustand, der, wie Walter Scott sich ausdrückt, vom Dichter, Humoristen und Politiker nichts mehr übrig liess als ein elendes menschliches Geschöpf, das fortfuhr zu athmen, ohne jemals wieder den mindesten Funken seines ausserordentlichen Geistes zu zeigen. In den letzten zwei oder drei Jahren hat Swift kaum mehr ein Wort gesprochen <sup>2</sup>." In connection with such a state of health the following lines seem anything but gay.

Deaf, giddy, helpless, left alone,  
 To all my friends a burthen grown,  
 No more I hear my church's bell  
 Than if it rang out for my knell :  
 At thunder now no more I start  
 Than at the rumbling of a cart :  
 Nay, what's incredible, alack !  
 I hardly hear my wife's clack <sup>3</sup>.

In another passage Prévost says : " Il faut connoître le caractère de M. le Docteur Swift pour ne rien perdre de ses vues dans le projet qu'il vient de faire éclore, et pour donner à la plus généreuse action de sa vie toute l'admiration qu'elle mérite. Ce célèbre Doyen de Saint Patrice est en possession depuis trente ans, de faire rire les trois royaumes d'Angleterre, d'Irlande et d'Ecosse, par sa manière de vivre, de penser

1. Writing to Pope, Oct. 12, 1727, Swift mentions his giddiness and his " comfortless deafness " (Pope's Works, Courthope and Elwin, 1871, Vol. VII, p. 100). Later there are frequent similar references. Cf. Pope to Swift, Vol. VII, p. 124, and Swift to Pope, pp. 140, 142.

2. Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, p. 301.

3. PC., V, 267-68. Prévost translates the verses.

et d'écrire. Cent traits agréables de sa conduite, et un nombre infini d'ouvrages tant en prose qu'en vers, où si l'on veut retrancher certaines idées basses et populaires, on trouve d'ailleurs tout le sel et l'agrément que les Anglois lui attribuent, l'ont fait regarder comme le modèle de la fine satire, de l'ironie délicate, et de la plaisanterie la plus ingénieuse et la plus agréable. Il n'est connu en France que par le *Gulliver* et le *Conte du Tonneau* dont on nous a donné la traduction ; mais quoique ces deux ouvrages ne fassent nul tort à sa réputation, je m'imaginais qu'elle paroîtroit mieux fondée à nos François s'il étoit trouvé quelqu'un qui nous eût traduit ses épîtres et ses poèmes, avec plusieurs petites pièces sur divers sujets, dont la beauté même a peut-être causé de l'embarras aux traducteurs [a]..... Enfin, quelque idée qu'on s'en forme en France, il est certain par le jugement et le témoignage d'une nation des plus éclairées, que M. Swift est un écrivain d'un mérite distingué, et que la comparaison qu'on fait de lui avec Rabelais ne déshonore point le bon Curé de Meudon.

“ C'est apparemment par les qualitez qui forment leur ressemblance, que le Doyen de Saint Patrice se regarde avec le plus de complaisance, puisqu'après avoir médité longtems sur la manière d'immortaliser son nom, il en a choisi une qui ne pouvoit tomber que dans l'esprit de Rabelais ou dans le sien. Il est riche et sans héritiers. L'usage qu'il a résolu de faire de ses richesses est d'élever un bâtiment qui servira de retraite à tous les fous et à tous les lunatiques d'Irlande.

“ [a] Il ne seroit pourtant pas à souhaiter pour son honneur, qu'on traduisit ses *Pensées diverses*. Elles passent en Angleterre pour originales ; mais on reconnoît ici qu'elles sont pillées pour la plupart dans la Bruière et la Rochefoucault. Il y en a quelques-unes néanmoins qui sont de lui <sup>1</sup>. ”

Again the idea of a gay buffoon. In his treatment of the “ bâtiment pour les fous et les lunatiques, ” it does not appear that Prévost has taken seriously the pamphlet of 1733 entitled :

1. PC., VI. 7-10.

A Serious and Useful Scheme to make a Hospital for Incurables, into which, as one of the "scribbling incurables," Swift had expressed the hope that he might be himself admitted. Rather it seems to be a semi-humorous treatment of Swift's perfectly serious later project to provide a retreat for those who might fall into the same utterly miserable condition as himself <sup>1</sup>. Thus again Prévost has failed to understand the real tragedy of Swift's life, and by his attitude has made it clear that he is not yet awake to humanitarian movements. The project of an asylum for the insane is to him nothing but a merry jest.

In admiring so highly Swift's poetry Prévost can no longer be upheld by modern criticism, for, though Swift did obtain some success in his lighter and satirical verse, he had no real poetic gift <sup>2</sup>. His verse has been described as having very little imagination or sentiment; as merely witty prose put into fluent verse, with clever rimes <sup>3</sup>. Voltaire was not behind Prévost in his admiration for Swift's poetry, and in the case of both this admiration seems highly significant. Not only Voltaire then, but also Prévost, that most Anglicized Frenchman (in Texte's phrase), is very much in accord with the classical school, whether it be in France or England, and shows little interest in poetry of a more romantic and lyrical character <sup>4</sup>. In this he is essentially of the early eighteenth century, and not in advance of his contemporaries.

More happily, Prévost calls attention to the distinctiveness of Swift's genius. "Si l'on a vu le Docteur Swift revenir souvent sur la scène, il n'est copié nulle part; c'est le propre de

1. Hettner notes (*op. cit.*, I, p. 301): "Im Gefühl dieser Lage schrieb er sein Testament und bestimmte sein Eigenthum, zehntausend Pfund, die er sich trotz vielseitiger Mildthätigkeit erspart hatte, zur Errichtung eines Irrenhauses."

2. Cf. PC, XII, 97: "Je ne sais par quel dépit contre les Muses le Docteur Swift a nommé l'art poétique la partie la moins sensée de la littérature." The reason is not far to seek.

3. *Cambridge History*, IX, p. 138.

4. Witness his scant interest in Thompson.



son caractère que de quelque côté qu'on le montre, il est toujours original <sup>1</sup>. "

Later he mentions his intention of translating some of Swift's " pensées détachées, " which he says the English compare to La Rochefoucauld <sup>2</sup>. Before, the same comparison had been used by Prévost himself with the idea of taking from Swift's originality, but now nothing is said of that. The cynicism common to the two writers does in fact make the comparison reasonably just. Swift himself wrote to Pope in 1725 of " Rochefoucauld, who is my favorite, because I found my whole character in him <sup>3</sup>. "

The amusing and well known story of the Partridge hoax is recounted in full <sup>4</sup>. Prévost translated also a part of Swift's satirical scheme for reforming the theaters <sup>5</sup>, according to which the actors would have been obliged to act as valets to the poets, brushing their clothes, helping them to dress, etc. A further suggestion was a " Council of Six " to be placed in the theater in full view of the audience to indicate which passages should be applauded and which hissed.

Prévost used an interesting and effective means of making his readers understand the great deficiencies of a prose translation of poetry <sup>6</sup>. Probably some of his subscribers had complained of disappointment with English poetry and such a demonstration was needed. He turns into prose a piece of Fontenelle's verse and two epigrams of de Charval's, then gives the originals. " Qu'après avoir comparé tous ces vers avec l'espèce de traduction où j'ai rendu exactement le même sens, on me dise pourquoi l'on y trouve quelque chose de plus agréable et de plus piquant que dans ma prose : et je me servirai de la

1. PC., VI, 129.

2. *Ibid.*, XI, 300.

3. Nov. 26, 1725. Pope's *Works*. Vol. VII, pp. 63-64. Six years later in his lines on his own death his opinion is the same.

4. PC., XI, 313-60.

5. *Ibid.*, XII, 148-52.

6. Du Bos had used the same method, taking two lines from Racine and putting them into prose. *Réflexions*, II, p. 555.

même raison pour expliquer comment les meilleures pièces de poésie angloise ne nous paroissent pas toujours mériter les éloges qu'elles reçoivent à Londres. Au reste je n'ai pas prétendu faire ici une remarque nouvelle, mais je me suis cru intéressé à réveiller l'attention de mes lecteurs sur ce que personne n'ignore <sup>1</sup>. " Such a concrete demonstration was naturally worth far more than a mere statement of fact, however often repeated.

The Martinus Scriblerus and Peri Bathous, or, as Prévost calls it, *le Traité du Profond* <sup>2</sup>, is classed with Hudibras as one of two " des plus célèbres ouvrages dont l'Angleterre se vante <sup>3</sup>, " and much space is justly given to it. Professor Saintsbury calls it one of Swift's most characteristic critical works <sup>4</sup>. " Le traité du Profond, " says Prévost, " est une autre nouveauté qui ne peut être comparée à rien, quoiqu'elle appartienne en général au genre ironique, dont tous les tems nous fournissent assez d'exemples ; mais il y a quelque chose de si neuf dans l'imagination de l'auteur, et de si original dans l'exécution comme dans le sujet de son Traité, qu'on ne lui disputera point l'honneur de s'être ouvert une route nouvelle et d'y avoir marché d'un pas qui lui est propre <sup>5</sup>.... Tous ces exemples [d'auteurs qui ont donné dans le profond] forment un recueil singulier dans leur langue. La nôtre en fourniroit-elle moins, si l'on commençoit, je ne dis pas au tems de du Bartas, mais aux Scudéris, aux le Moines, aux Chappelains et aux des Marets, qui fleurissoient sous Louis le Grand ; et si l'on descendoit, depuis ces héros du profond, jusqu'à nous <sup>6</sup> ? " The translation is continued at length <sup>7</sup>, unfortunately without, as Prévost repeats, the examples from English authors. However, there is enough to give a fairly complete

1. PC., XIII, 207.

2. Sometimes, however, attributed to Pope.

3. PC., XIII, 289.

4. *Hist. of Crit.*, Vol. II, p. 452.

5. PC., XIII, 290.

6. *Ibid.*, 312.

7. *Ibid.*, 324-35.

idea of the work, and certainly Swift appears very much to his advantage, as Prévost himself observes <sup>1</sup>.

Prévost's readers were fond of English epigrams. In fact Lebrun in France later raised the genre to the height of an artistic triumph. In consequence they appear rather frequently in the *Pour et Contre*, much too frequently from the modern point of view. Space is given to some of Swift's <sup>2</sup>, but they have little importance beside his other work. Swift is also spoken of as about to compose in his old age a work in defense of religion to offset the Tale of a Tub and other satires, which the English apologist cited by Prévost says were not really directed against Christianity, but had been by many incorrectly interpreted to be so <sup>3</sup>.

In summing up Prévost's treatment of Swift, we see that the French author had an almost total misconception of his fundamental spirit of bitterness, far removed from the idea of the gay jester offered to the readers of the *Pour et Contre*. The two greatest works, Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub, are not discussed at all, but only mentioned in passing. The reason can hardly be that they were already too well known in France. If they had pleased Prévost, he would scarcely have passed them over with the deprecatory phrase: " Il n'est connu en France que par le *Gulliver* et le *Conte du Tonneau*, dont on nous a donné la traduction : mais quoique ces deux ouvrages ne fassent nul tort à sa réputation, je m'imagine qu'elle paroîtroit mieux fondée à nos François s'il s'étoit trouvé quelqu'un qui nous eût traduit ses Epîtres et ses poèmes, avec plusieurs petites pièces sur divers sujets, dont la beauté même <sup>4</sup>, " etc. To prefer the epistles and the poems and the " petites pièces " to Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub is sufficiently to indicate that he did not understand the genius of Swift, too different, in his best work, from the French standards of the period. Too

1. PC., XIII, 335. Also XIX, 157.

2. *Ibid.*, XVI, 155-58.

3. *Ibid.*, XVI, 159-60.

4. *Ibid.*, VI, 8-9.

much space is given to mere anecdote and unimportant epigram, but we must not forget that as a journalist Prévost had first of all to entertain and to give space to many other things besides literary criticism. Prévost entirely overestimated Swift's abilities as a poet, as did Voltaire. In fact the two have much more in common and are much nearer in essential ideas of taste than has been generally supposed<sup>1</sup>. The Bathos alone is estimated at its just value and rightly much space is given to it.

It seems that in missing the essential and stressing the unimportant, Prévost showed himself to be fulfilling rather unwillingly the task which his program imposed. He did not understand Swift, nor did he admire him very deeply, but it was necessary to talk of Swift to the French public and as favorably as possible. The result we have seen. It is significant that he well judged Pope, so characteristically French in the main, and went far astray with Swift, more essentially English.

## CHAPTER XV

### PRÉVOST AND GEORGE LILLO

George Lillo's *London Merchant* was a great popular success. It was first played at the Drury Lane theater in the summer of 1731<sup>2</sup> and continued to be given to large houses for several

1. V. Schrøder ("L'abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du dix-huitième siècle*, 1914, p. 136) comes nearest the truth, but still does not stress the point sufficiently nor develop it at all in detail.

2. First given June 22, 1731. The Abbé Raynal states: "L'abbé Prévost qui s'est trouvé à Londres lorsqu'on a représenté *Le Marchand de Londres*, ou l'histoire de George Barnwell, par Georges Lillo, pour la première fois, m'a dit qu'il n'avait vu de spectacle si frappant que celui-là." Cited by Harris, *L'Abbé Prévost*, p. 146.

If, as the Abbé Raynal states, it was really the first performance, and not one of the later ones in 1733, that Prévost saw, then it is necessary to accept the hypothesis that Prévost, who was back in Holland in the fall of 1730, made a short trip to England in the summer of 1731. This hypothesis is not considered probable by Harris in the *Vie monastique*, p. 48, note 1. It is quite possible, however.

years. Abroad it was even more popular. Prévost gives exact details of its great success. He shows that he has seen it performed and has been strongly impressed.

“ Une tragédie qui a été représentée trente-huit fois consécutives sur le théâtre de Drurylane, avec des applaudissemens soutenus, et un nombre de spectateurs presque toujours égal; qui a eu le même succez sur tous les théâtres où elle a paru; dont il s'est débité plusieurs milliers d'exemplaires imprimez, et qu'on ne lit pas avec moins d'ardeur et de plaisir qu'on ne l'a vu représenter; une tragédie qui s'est attiré tant de marques d'approbation et d'estime, doit faire naître à ceux qui en entendront parler, l'une ou l'autre de ces deux pensées: ou qu'elle est un de ces chefs-d'œuvre dont la parfaite beauté se fait sentir à tout le monde; ou qu'elle est si conforme au goût particulier de la nation dont elle fait ainsi les délices, qu'elle peut servir de règle certaine pour juger du goût présent de cette nation pour les spectacles.

“ Je veux laisser à mes lecteurs le plaisir de décider eux-mêmes sous lequel de ces deux titres *Georges Barnwell* a pu ravir tous les suffrages de la nation angloise <sup>1</sup>. ”

The second of the two hypotheses suggested is the one Prévost considers the true one, but that does not prevent him from enjoying parts of the piece. Note the use of the word *tragedy* in spite of the presence of bourgeois characters. This also implies a certain liberalism. He goes on to summarize the plot <sup>2</sup>, then translates “ quelques-unes des plus belles scènes. ”

“ Je ne dois pas oublier, ” he continues, “ que Barnwell reçoit dans sa prison la visite de son maître Thorowgood, celle de son ami Truman, et celle de Marie, son amante. Ces trois entrevues forment trois scènes aussi touchantes que bizarres. Thorowgood lui parle en père, qui a le cœur brisé de tendresse et de douleur; Truman en désespéré, qui voudroit mourir pour l'arracher à la mort et à l'infamie; Marie, en amante éperdue

1. PC., III, 337-38.

2. *Ibid.*, 338-43.



qui n'a plus rien à ménager en perdant un homme qu'elle adore.

“ Au reste, il n'y a pas un seul trait dans cette exposition qui ne se passe aux yeux des spectateurs. La séduction de Barnwell dans la maison de Millwood, le vol de l'argent chez Thorowgood, le meurtre de l'oncle, etc. : tout s'exécute sur le théâtre, sans aucun égard pour l'unité de tems et de lieu. On suppose que le meurtre se fait dans un bois à quelque distance de la ville ; que la maison de Thorowgood est dans un quartier de Londres éloigné de celui de Millwood ; la prison dans un autre, etc. Enfin, l'imagination des Anglois est si favorable à cette pièce, qu'elle supplée à tous les défauts de justesse et de vraisemblance <sup>1</sup>. ”

Prévost translates Act I, scene 3, but not the scene which contains Barnwell's seduction, for, though he finds it “ d'un tour tout à fait ingénieux et agréable, ” it is contrary to “ la bienséance françoise, ” which, “ plus rigoureuse que celle d'Angleterre, ne me permet pas de la traduire. Celle qui représente les agitations et les remords de Barnwell, lorsqu'étant de retour au logis, après avoir perdu son innocence, il essuye les tendres reproches de son ami Truman, et de toute la famille de son maître, à qui son absence avoit causé beaucoup d'inquiétude pendant toute la nuit, est d'une beauté singulière<sup>2</sup>. ” In Act III, scenes 3 and 4 are translated. At the end of the fourth scene, after the murder of his uncle, “ Barnwell jette ici son masque, et pénétré des dernières paroles de son oncle, il se précipite sur son corps qu'il embrasse en lui adressant les choses les plus tendres, et j'ose dire en même temps les plus terribles ; car c'est le caractère particulier des Anglois de savoir joindre merveilleusement ces deux sortes de sentimens (a).

“ (a) C'est la seule des idées d'Aristote qu'ils adoptent et qu'ils suivent. Ils savent même unir quelquefois l'agréable et le terrible :

1. PC., III, 343-44.

2. *Ibid.*, 350-51.

Témoin le bel endroit du Cato qui finit ainsi : " Eternity, thou pleasing dreadful thought <sup>1</sup>. "

This lingering trace of Aristotle shows that Prévost's classical training persists, though he does not indicate his personal attitude toward the authority invoked. It is to be noted that the scenes are " touchantes, " a characteristic which we are not surprised to find emphasized by one of the first popularizers of tears in France. Lillo is a forerunner of Richardson, both in his sentimentality and in his moralizing tendency, and Prévost is the translator of Richardson. The violation of the unity of place is mentioned, but — significantly — not objected to. Prévost finds, however, that there are shortcomings in the matter of " vraisemblance. " One of the scenes is " d'une beauté singulière. " The union of the " tendre " and the " terrible " is another trait that has impressed the French author. The vigor, the sentimentality, the rapidity of physical action have all struck Prévost forcibly. He does not seem to find it objectionable that there is a good deal of the melodramatic in it all. Why should he when his own novels are filled with the same note ?

In another passage we see the Prévost whose novels were described by Rousseau as " d'un sombre coloris " and who grew fond of multiplying the number of corpses. English influence did not create this taste<sup>2</sup>, but it did intensify it. In this connection it is strange that Prévost makes no mention of such a characteristic in Shakespear, except apparently to condemn it. It is with real pleasure, however, that he brings Barnwell back on the scene. " Je vais ramener sur la scène le parricide Barnwell, et causer de l'effroi à mes lecteurs par la barbarie monstrueuse de Millwood. C'est la singularité de cette scène plutôt que sa beauté qui me porte à la traduire <sup>3</sup>. "

1. PC., III, 356. Cf. *supra*, Chapter viii.

2. The first four volumes of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* are the proof.

3. PC., IV, 48.

Of Act IV he translates scenes 2 and 3. Of the latter scene he says : " Dans un païs où l'on peut dire qu'on est acoutumé aux spectacles tragiques, et où les plus touchans ne sont pas toujours réservés pour le théâtre, on auroit peine à se figurer jusqu'à quel point le public a été frappé de cette scène. L'étonnement et l'horreur étoient visibles à chaque représentation sur le visage des spectateurs. C'étoit un silence si profond et si lugubre, que pour s'en former l'idée il faudroit éprouver quelque chose du sentiment qui le causoit. L'art d'un comédien habile aide beaucoup sans doute à ces impressions extraordinaires, dont il n'y a point de spectateur qui puisse se défendre... Mais je crois que ce qui n'y contribue guères moins, est la suite de l'action dans une pièce heureusement conduite<sup>1</sup>. "

The personal reminiscences of the emotion visible on the faces of the audience are an interesting document in connection with the success of a piece to which, as Hettner relates, the merchants of the city used to send their apprentices to learn the tragic penalties of dishonesty, and which is said in one instance at least actually to have brought about the reform of one of these young employees who had misappropriated funds entrusted to him<sup>2</sup>. Prévost himself this time goes far with the crowd and shares much of their impression. His attitude toward Lillo shows clearly a Prévost sentimental and " sensible, " the same who is familiar to us from his novels. Nothing could be more noticeable than the difference between this criticism, which is personal and concrete, attaching itself definitely to particular scenes, and the vague generalities he uses about Shakespear. That contrast is not the least valuable and significant characteristic of his treatment of the London Merchant.

Lillo, it will be remembered, repopularized in England the " tragédie bourgeoise " which had been temporarily supplanted by French heroic tragedy. Diderot was strongly influenced by the London Merchant and was impelled to start

1. PC., IV, 23-24.

2. Hettner, Vol. I, p. 467.

in France the movement to bring tragedy down from its lofty pedestal to the commonplace realities of every-day life. So it is of no slight importance that as early as 1734 Prévost made Lillo's play well known to a wide circle of the most cultivated readers in France<sup>1</sup>.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PREVOST AND OTHER ENGLISH AUTHORS

Certain other authors treated by Prévost in less detail are yet important enough to be given some consideration in a study of his criticism, as much perhaps for what he does not say as for what he does. First among these is Butler.

"Hudibras, poème né depuis un siècle, est en effet une des plus singulières productions de l'esprit humain et le chef-d'œuvre d'un genre dans lequel les Anciens ne nous ont point laissé de modèles<sup>2</sup>." Immediately before, Prévost had expressed surprise that two such famous works as Hudibras and the *Traité du Profond* had not merely found no translators — that might be explained by the very special difficulty of the task — but had not even been to some degree made known in France by means of short extracts. We have seen that he himself undertook to perform this service for Swift's work, but, whether intentionally or not, he never attempted it for Butler. The impossibility of translating Hudibras had already been insisted upon by Voltaire in the *Lettres philosophiques* three years before the above passage. We can be grateful to Prévost for not repeating the old comparisons with the *Satire*

1. Rousseau in his *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) referred to "le Marchand de Londres, pièce admirable, et dont la morale va plus directement au but qu'aucune pièce françoise que je connoisse." *Œuvres*, Hachette, 1862, Vol. I, p. 215, note 1.

2. PC., XIII, 290.

*Ménipée* and *Don Quixote*<sup>1</sup>, even though the setting of *Hudibras* is in fact a reverse imitation of the Spanish work; and we can be still more grateful for his not going the length of Voltaire in extravagant praise. However, Prévost's estimate is too general and too lacking in originality to be of value. It adds nothing to what had gone before.

On Chaucer there is a curious passage. "Geoffroi Chaucer, poète fameux qui florissoit sous son règne [de Henri IV] . . . . Ce Chaucer, auteur de plusieurs poésies qui sont encore en estime, et Jean Gauwer, autre poète du même tems, passent communément pour les premiers réformateurs de la langue angloise, à peu près comme Malherbe a cette gloire parmi nous<sup>2</sup>. " Certainly Chaucer would have been amused, Malherbe furious at the comparison. Prévost often uses this comparative method in order to make known the importance of English authors in literary history. The method is useful, but sometimes dangerous, as here. Prévost's excuse for the error is that in his time the English poet was still very little and very poorly known even in his own country. The fact that the necessity of pronouncing his final e's was not yet understood made appreciation of his poetry impossible. For that he still had to wait fifty years. Prévost has evidently not read him and is only repeating a common catchword. But it is something to have mentioned Chaucer; Voltaire in his *Letters* had not done even that much.

Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profanity of the English Stage* (1698) had been translated as early as 1715, but Prévost has nothing important to say of him, which seems somewhat strange, in view of Prévost's own seeming distaste for Restoration drama. However, he probably felt that Collier had gone too far in the other direction and had sinned equally against good taste. He calls him only "un écrivain anglois de quelque réputation" who has

1. Voltaire's comparisons; the second, however, had already been made by Du Bos (1719), *Réflexions*, 6th ed., 1755, p. 146, note.

2. PC., XX, 78-79.



given to the public "divers essais d'histoire et de critique, qui peuvent me fournir la matière d'une feuille intéressante<sup>1</sup>," then goes on to translate some of his remarks on Scotland. Of course we must always take into account the fact that time only may have prevented Prévost from returning to him.

The death of "Jean Dennys" (December 17, 1733) is mentioned, and Prévost adds: "Il est mort dans un âge fort avancé, et aussi couvert de gloire et de blessures que peut l'être un critique qui n'a fait que mordre et recevoir des morsures pendant toute sa vie<sup>2</sup>." "Son humeur caustique et presque insociable" is mentioned. "Dans tout autre pays que l'Angleterre... il auroit été forcé peut-être de renoncer à la société et de se retirer dans un désert, à moins qu'il n'eût su prendre assez d'empire sur lui-même pour déguiser ses qualitez insociables ou du moins pour les adoucir. Etant Anglois, il a eu pendant toute sa vie le privilège d'être médisant et satirique, sans que personne ait eu droit de l'obliger au silence<sup>3</sup>." The last sentence at least is interesting as presenting the traditional idea of English freedom and violence of speech coming into conflict with the French ideal of sociability. In the case of Dennis the estimate is just enough, for his old age was embittered by sickness and debt<sup>4</sup> and by the long and violent strife in which he was involved with Pope<sup>5</sup>, Addison, Steele, and Swift<sup>6</sup>. Theobald called him the "modern Furius<sup>7</sup>"; Pope, the "surley Dennis<sup>8</sup>." Thus Prévost reflects directly the contemporary English view as supported by the most influential literary men of the country.

There is one other reference in which "feu Monsieur Dennys" is called "un de leurs plus célèbres critiques," and Prévost

1. PC., IX, 73.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 68.

3. *Ibid.*, III, 68, 70.

4. H. G. Paul, *John Dennis*, p. 61.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

adds : " J'ai vu de lui une brochure particulière, dans laquelle il entreprend de faire ouvrir les yeux de sa patrie, sur la contradiction qui semble y régner perpétuellement entre le goût et les idées <sup>1</sup>. " This is a repetition of the old theme that in literary matters the English have reached the point of knowing the better way, but without practicing it. Prévost welcomes the idea and is fond of insisting upon it.

It is especially unfortunate that Prévost does not characterize in more detail the critical work of Dennis and estimate its value. Such an estimate would have aided materially in forming a correct idea of Prévost's own critical attitude. It is possible that he found Dennis too much of a " strait-rule " critic<sup>2</sup> for his taste.

To Gay is accorded a casual note : " M. Gay, dont tout le mérite est d'avoir composé l'*Opéra des Gueux*, qui n'est qu'une turlupinade, assez ingénieuse à la vérité, mais pleine de traits bas et obscènes <sup>3</sup>. "

The Beggar's Opera was first played on the twenty-ninth of January, 1728. Its success was very great, comparable to that of the London Merchant. In the same winter it was repeated sixty-two times, so that it has been called the first popular success of the modern English stage<sup>4</sup>. Its literary value is small, and here Prévost is keensighted enough not to be blinded by the furor it was causing at the very time he first entered England ; its musical significance he could hardly be expected to perceive at that time<sup>5</sup>. The chief importance of the citation is as evidence that Prévost is once more " non-anglomane, " and that he forms judgments contrary to the

1. PC., XI, 120.

2. Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, Vol. II, pp. 432-37.

3. PC., IV, 253-54, note (a).

4. *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 182-83 ; where, however, the date of the first representation is incorrectly put after 1736, and then stated correctly five lines below.

5. Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, pp. 245-46. " Diese musikalische Bedeutung ist die bleibende. Durch die Wiedererweckung des alten Volksliedes ist die Bettleroper in höchsten Sinn epochemachend geworden. "

current of popular enthusiasm in England. Indeed, we have already seen that there is a great deal of the French attitude which he has by no means thrown over. The objection to the " traits bas et obscènes " is characteristic.

Ben Jonson is not estimated by Prévost himself, but an English judgment is given, an unfavorable one. This is in itself significant, since he is at no pains to correct it, as he often does when he quotes criticism not his own. " Si l'on demande après cela ce que les Anglois pensent de Ben Johnson ; voici leur jugement dans les termes d'un de leurs plus célèbres critiques :

" Il étoit fort versé dans les lettres, et c'est l'avantage qu'il  
 " a sur Shakespear. Mais ce que celui-ci avoit reçu de la nature,  
 " est plus qu'une balance égale pour ce que l'autre avoit puisé  
 " dans ses livres. Si Shakespear n'avoit pas lu les Anciens,  
 " il s'ensuit qu'il n'a rien pris d'eux. Ben Johnson au contraire  
 " n'a pas fait difficulté de les piller ouvertement, et ne l'a  
 " pas toujours fait à leur avantage ni au sien ; car si Auguste  
 " et Virgile étoient tels en effet qu'il les a représentés dans  
 " la scène de son *Poetaster*, l'un fut le plus bizarre empereur,  
 " et l'autre le plus ridicule poète qu'il y ait jamais <sup>1</sup>. "

This criticism is translated from Rowe <sup>2</sup>, the source of Prévost's information on Shakespear.

Saint-Evremond, one remembers, had put Molière and Ben Jonson on an equal plane. " Notre Molière à qui les Anglois ont inspiré le bon esprit de la comédie, égale leur Ben Johnson à bien représenter les diverses humeurs et les différentes manières des hommes ; l'un et l'autre conservant dans leurs peintures un juste rapport avec le génie de leur nation. Je croirois qu'ils ont été plus loin que les Anciens en ce point-là <sup>3</sup>. "

Muralt observed that " l'Angleterre, aussi bien que la France, a eu son plus haut période pour la comédie. Ben Johnson qui

1. PC., XIV, 46-47.

2. Rowe, *Essay on the Life of Shakespear*, pp. XIII-XV.

3. *Œuvres meslées*, 1709, Vol. II, pp. 212-13.

vivoit au commencement de ce siècle est le poète qui l'a portée le plus loin, " but : " Je dirois que Ben Johnson, quoique véritablement grand poète, à certains égards, est inférieur à Molière en beaucoup de choses "; however, in conclusion : " Après tout il faut avouer que Ben Johnson est un poète judicieux, admirable à distinguer et à soutenir les caractères qu'il entreprend, et dont les bonnes pièces sont excellentes dans leur espèce <sup>1</sup>. " Muralt prefers him to Shakespear. Prévost evidently knows better than that at any rate.

The English *Observations sur Muralt* admitted that Jonson had faults. He knew nothing of " galanterie, " but this was due to the taste of the time and the fact that there were no women acting until the time of Charles II. However, says the author, we esteem him, for he is worthy of esteem and has appeared so to Saint-Evremond. " Personne n'a plus approfondi la nature humaine et n'a plus épuisé tous les caractères qu'il a introduits sur la scène <sup>2</sup>. "

As for Prévost, he is quite probably speaking of Jonson from hearsay, or at any rate without much personal interest. The exaggeration of type in Jonson might very well have repelled him, but on the whole it seems more probable that he did not know him at first hand. His information about the Elizabethan period in general is very meager. We have seen already how little evidence he gives of knowing more even of Shakespear than he could learn from Rowe and Gildon. How much less then of other authors of the period, even though, like Jonson, of classical tendencies !

1. Muralt; 2nd ed., 1727, pp. 22-23.

2. *Observations* bound in the same volume with Muralt, p. 330.

## CHAPTER XVII

## PRÉVOST'S SOURCES AND HIS INFLUENCE

At the Jesuit college of Hesdin, at Louis-le-Grand, and at La Flèche, the Abbé Prévost received an education which developed in him for all his life a taste for study and a keen perception of literary beauty<sup>1</sup>. His early studies and his later activities as a member of the Benedictines were all calculated to familiarize him especially with the Latin classics, and he did not react against this training. On the contrary, we find him referring in his works to Virgil and citing frequently Horace. He knew Italian also and referred occasionally in the *Pour et Contre* to Tasso, Guarini, and others. There was nothing then in his education calculated to develop one of the popularizers of English literature in France, or the champion of Shakespear and the forerunner of Romanticism which some — and not entirely without justice — have been pleased to see in him<sup>2</sup>.

His attitude toward the Ancient and Modern controversy is not difficult to determine. We have spoken of his love for the classics. The statement is supported by Prévost himself, when he mentions "le plaisir que je prens toujours à ce qui rapproche de moi la *bonne* antiquité<sup>3</sup>." "Il me paroît surprenant," he says in another passage, "que de tant de poètes modernes qui se sont fait une réputation distinguée dans les différentes parties de l'Europe, il n'y en ait presque pas un dont les opuscles aient été traduits dans une autre langue.

1. V. Schröder, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 4-5, and note.

2. Benjamin M. Woodbridge, *Romantic Tendencies in the Novels of the Abbé Prévost*, PMLA., Vol. XXVI (1911), has pointed out Romantic traits in the novels. I do not take issue with this view so far as his literary practice in the novels is concerned, but do not find that it has left traces in his literary criticism.

3. PC., XIX, 231.



On n'est pas si indifférent pour toutes les pièces de cette nature qui nous restent d'Athènes et de Rome. N'est-ce pas encore une preuve tacite de la supériorité des Anciens<sup>1</sup>?" Prévost here takes no account of other possible reasons than the one he wishes to deduce, but the passage is only the more significant because of its inaccurate reasoning. Yet we must not too quickly nor too completely draw him over to the side of the Ancients. We have already seen him, in connection with Dryden's *All for Love*, close to the position of Fontenelle<sup>2</sup>. In fact Prévost in the *Pour et Contre* causes his "Avocat"<sup>3</sup> to say: "On croiroit après cette remarque que je panche du côté des Anciens. Non, j'entre dans ce tempérament raisonnable qui a rendu M. Wotton un de nos plus judicieux écrivains. . . . Je ne trouve rien de si judicieux et de si modéré que les termes ausquels M. Wotton a réduit toute la question. 1. Si dans les choses où l'on suppose que les Anciens sont parvenus à la perfection, cela vient de ce qu'ils ont eu plus de génie que ceux qui les ont suivis, ou de ce qu'ils sont nez les premiers. 2. S'il y a quelques arts ou quelques sciences que les Anciens aient exercez ou sçu plus parfaitement que les Modernes, quoique ceux-ci aient fait leur possible pour les égaler. 3. S'il n'y a point quelques autres arts ou quelques autres sciences dans lesquels les Modernes aient surpassé les Anciens, quoique les uns et les autres aient fait tous leurs efforts pour y réussir<sup>4</sup>. " It is probably significant of influence on Prévost that the Abbé Du Bos had cited Wotton to the same effect fifteen years before. "M. Wotton, en mettant le sçavoir des Modernes au-dessus de celui des Anciens dans la plupart des arts et des sciences, tombe d'accord néanmoins que dans la poésie et dans l'éloquence les Anciens ont surpassé les Modernes de bien loin<sup>5</sup>. " The question of influence here

1. PC., XVI, 60.

2. See *supra*, p. 76 and note 4.

3. The "avocat" is the mouthpiece for the French attitude, as is the "ministre" for the English.

4. PC., V, 82, 84-85.

5. Du Bos, I, p. 151.

is made more doubtful by the fact that Prévost's passage is put in the mouth of the "avocat" and not stated to be his own opinion. In another passage, however, he speaks in his own person. "Les François, après avoir paru balancer longtems entre les Anciens et les Modernes, ont pris sans doute le seul parti raisonnable, lorsque renonçant à toutes les préventions qui peuvent tourner au désavantage des uns et des autres, ils se sont accordez à estimer et à suivre tout ce qui leur paroît bon, dans quelque tems et dans quelque lieu qu'il ait pris naissance. Ainsi leur goût portant moins sur les tems que sur les choses, ils jouissent sans exception de tout ce que les arts et les sciences ont produit d'estimable dans tous les siècles ; et par une disposition si raisonnable et si désintéressée, l'on peut dire dans un autre sens que M. de La Motte, qu'ils sont

Contemporains de tous les hommes,  
Et citoyens de tous les lieux <sup>1</sup>.

As in the case of Prévost's treatment of the rules<sup>2</sup>, it is impossible to praise too highly the balance and general soundness of judgment shown in this passage. Doubtless, in spite of his polite and tactful statement, his countrymen had not in general advanced so far ; it is his own attitude that he is really expressing, not theirs. It would be well for Prévost if we could leave this as the final statement of his views. Unfortunately he took up the question again, less happily. "Tous les partisans du bon goût. . . . s'accorderont aussi avec M. de Merville dans l'endroit où il ajoute, que "la dispute sur le "mérite des Anciens, qui du tems de Perrault pouvoit passer "pour un point de droit, est présentement un point de fait "décidé par l'expérience. Auroit-on la hardiesse de nier que "ceux d'entre nos écrivains qui ont étudié et imité les "Anciens, soient nos plus grands hommes, et qu'ils ayent "fait des chefs-d'œuvre ; tandis que ceux qui les ont méprisez,

1. PC., VI, 292-93.

2. *Supra*, pp. 92 ff.

“ et qui ont évité toute ressemblance avec eux sont à peine connus, ou du moins n'ont rien fait d'estimable ? ”

“ Cette manière de rendre justice aux Anciens est aussi modérée qu'ingénieuse ; car sans employer le terme odieux de préférence, qui est capable en effet de révolter un peu les Modernes, les degrés et les rangs se trouvent fort bien assignez. Il est constant que les Anciens ont découvert les bonnes règles et saisi le vrai goût pour tous les ouvrages d'esprit. Qu'on dise, si l'on veut, que leur avantage est d'avoir été les premiers ; mais comme les principes du bon goût sont aussi simples et aussi invariables que ceux de la vérité, il faut nécessairement marcher sur leurs traces pour arriver à la perfection dont ils nous ont tracé des modèles. Ce qui n'empêche point qu'on ne puisse s'élever aussi haut qu'eux, car pourquoi diroit-on que le fond de la nature est altéré dans leurs descendants ? Mais celui qui se proposeroit de les égaler, doit penser d'abord à les imiter ; ou s'il arrivoit, par une heureuse réunion d'efforts et de talents, qu'on produisît quelque chose de vraiment estimable sans les avoir consultez, on seroit tout surpris de s'apercevoir à la fin que ce qu'on auroit fait de meilleur ressembleroit à ce qui nous vient d'eux et que sans avoir su par quelle voye ils ont marché on n'auroit réussi qu'autant que le hazard ou la force de la nature en auroit fait approcher<sup>1</sup>. ” Certainly we are very far here from the vision of a Prévost speaking “ without respect for the Ancients and their rules<sup>2</sup>. ” There is much good sense in the passage, but the best is Merville's and not Prévost's. It is quite surprising to find the latter, so often inspired by the doctrine of relativity, asserting that “ les principes du bon goût sont aussi simples et aussi invariables que ceux de la vérité<sup>3</sup>, ” and that one must follow the Ancients “ pour arriver à la perfection dont ils nous ont tracé des modèles. ” Though stated with moderation, the doctrine but slightly masks a very narrow and absolute dogmatism whose chief merit is

1. PC., IX, 348-49.

2. Jusserand, p. 173.

3. Yes, if all truth were perfectly known.

that it does not at any rate deny to the Moderns the possibility of equaling their great predecessors, but which is very much marred by prescribing that they must do it by following the same methods. Prévost's classical training has evidently dominated him more than any other passage of his would permit us to suppose. Explanation of the lack of harmony between this and his previous utterances on the same question lies probably simply in those contradictions which almost always appear at different times in the writing of any one whose special care has not been to try to put his varying moods and opinions in harmony. Prévost wrote always very rapidly; journalistic work like the *Pour et Contre* was probably composed with particular haste; he could never imagine that it would ever be closely scrutinized and the effort made to harmonize and evaluate his different opinions; so that it is not strange that we should find such a passage as the one just cited. Probably it does express his real attitude, but more absolutely than he actually intended. We can hardly doubt that he preferred in his heart the Ancients and those who had imitated them most successfully. Were not his three favorites Racine, La Bruyère, and Fénelon<sup>1</sup>? But his practice makes it evident that he was open-minded in his attitude and, as he himself says, ready to esteem and follow all that appears good, "dans quelque tems et dans quelque lieu qu'il ait pris naissance." Only it is clear that his theoretical open-mindedness was limited by his education and preferences so that he would still use the Ancients as his measuring staff. It is for this reason that he is unable really to appreciate Shakespear and Swift, but is successful in dealing with the more classical Dryden, Steele, Addison, and Pope.

In his attitude Prévost is substantially in accord with Du Bos, who also was influenced by Wotton. Du Bos was certainly known to Prévost, even though not mentioned by him<sup>2</sup>,

1. MHQ., I, 170.

2. Du Bos was mentioned favorably by Desfontaines during his editorship of Volume II of the *Pour et Contre*.

and his general spirit was fitted to please our Abbé. It is probable, however, that there is here no question of direct influence. At the most Du Bos could hardly have done more than strengthen Prévost in the opinion which his whole education and cast of mind would have tended in any case almost inevitably to form. Prévost surely derives much more from the classical authors whom he read in his youth at Hesdin and at Louis-le-Grand, and from the Racine, the La Bruyère, and the Fénelon whom he later loved so well.

In placing men of this period properly among the "familles d'esprits," one other much discussed question is very helpful, that of rhyme. "La rime", says Prévost, "n'est pas une perfection dans la poésie, . . . elle doit même être regardée comme un défaut<sup>1</sup>." "On conviendra volontiers qu'elle est la poésie du vulgaire, c'est-à-dire de tous ceux qui ne sont point capables de sentir d'autre différence entre la prose et les vers<sup>2</sup>." "N'est-il pas certain qu'elle est le fruit de la corruption du goût dans des siècles d'ignorance et de barbarie<sup>3</sup>?" "La même raison qui a fait que les Grecs et les Romains ont négligé la rime dans les bons siècles de leur langue, fait que les Anglois et les Italiens la rejettent aujourd'hui, parce que leur langue est assez parfaite pour se passer de ce secours. Ils ne sont pas les inventeurs d'une nouvelle poésie, mais les restituteurs de la bonne. Quant au plaisir qu'ils y prennent, l'auteur n'en doit pas douter, puisque ceux de leurs poètes dont ils font le plus de cas, ont été les premiers qui ont secoué le joug de la rime<sup>4</sup>." Fénelon, Prévost's ancestor in certain respects, had opposed rhyme, though less completely. "Notre versification perd plus, si je ne me trompe, qu'elle ne gagne par les rimes. . . Je n'ai garde néanmoins de vouloir abolir les rimes; sans elles, notre poésie tomberait<sup>5</sup>."

1. PC., VI, 75.

2. *Ibid.*, X, 250.

3. *Ibid.*, X, 249. Cf. XII, 253.

4. *Ibid.*, X, 283. Cf. V, 81; X, 243-64, 278-88; XX, 13.

5. Fénelon, *Lettre à l'Académie*, Chap. V, Cahen ed., 1908, p. 55 and p. 58.



La Motte, the enemy of poetry in general, opposed rhyme in particular on the ground that it distorted thought. At least his position was more reasonable than that of Fontenelle, who saw in rhyme only the merit of the "difficulté vaincue." If that were indeed all, then certainly it should be abolished. Du Bos likewise had attacked rhyme. It is difficult not to see in the following passage the origin of at least one of Prévost's contentions: "La rime, ainsi que les siefs et les duels, doit donc son origine à la barbarie de nos ancêtres<sup>1</sup>. " "Enfin il faut rimer," says Du Bos, but he accepts it only as a regrettable, though unavoidable, sign of the inferiority of the French language in comparison with Greek and Latin. "Peut-on d'ailleurs ne point regarder le travail bizarre de rimer comme la plus basse fonction de la mécanique de la poésie<sup>2</sup>?" Prévost's position is different from that of Du Bos only in that he carries the argument to its logical conclusion and, along with La Motte, refuses to accept the evil as inevitable. His patriotism refuses to acknowledge that French is inferior as a poetic medium to Greek or Latin, Italian or English. The charm of Italian "versi sciolti" and the majesty of Milton's blank verse<sup>3</sup> have aroused his admiration. In thinking that, in order to equal them, all which eighteenth-century French poetry needed to do was to discard rhyme, Prévost was obviously wrong. To Voltaire, perhaps not without reason, rhyme seemed more necessary for French than for other languages whose accentual character and greater liberty of syntax made possible more varied metrical combinations. Even in his error, Prévost showed an appreciation of the fact that French poetry needed to be rejuvenated; his poetic perceptions were less blunted than were those of La Motte, and of the greater Montesquieu and Buffon; he was wrong only in his choice of the method<sup>4</sup>. From time to time under the influence of some

1. Du Bos, I, p. 363.

2. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 336, 357-58. Cf. I, p. 299.

3. Cf. *supra*, Chap. x.

4. In PC., XII, 21-22, we find this citation: "La poésie n'a peut-être

particularly vigorous gust of foreign poetry he felt vaguely conscious of something in which the elegant versifiers of his own country were lacking, and sought a remedy, finding it, as he thought, in the criticisms of Fénelon, La Motte, and Du Bos.

Among the influences which produced Prévost's liberalism, Montaigne<sup>1</sup>, whom he often cites, is important. Fénelon also, for whom Prévost had an especial fondness and with whom he had many characteristics in common<sup>2</sup>, had welcomed the idea of relativity. "Chaque nation a ses mœurs, très différentes de celles des peuples voisins<sup>3</sup>." Bayle, constantly attacking dogmatism of whatever form, appealed strongly to Prévost, who cites him as frequently as he does Montaigne. The Abbé was much impressed by Bayle's open-minded spirit of inquiry and by the power of his logic. "Il y a peu d'esprits aussi nets, aussi justes, et aussi pénétrants que le sien<sup>4</sup>." Fontenelle he admires also, because of his "élégance" particularly<sup>5</sup>, but also because of his knowledge of the sciences<sup>6</sup>. It is hardly to be doubted that Fontenelle's attacks on tradition had their effect on Prévost and helped to free him in part from the weight of the past. The whole quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns tended of course in that direction. In fact the one great result of that controversy was the releasing of the spirit of progress and of self-reliance. Prévost, as we have seen, was

jamais été cultivée avec tant de succès; car dans quel rang la postérité ne mettra-t-elle pas le siècle des Rousseaux, des Voltaires, et de tant d'autres poètes qui se succèdent sans interruption? ... Comment craindre la décadence du savoir et du goût dans un siècle où ils s'établissent tous les jours sur de si bons fondemens? "The passage is not given as Prévost's own opinion but as part of a letter from an "inconnu" (p. 13) who may or may not be a mask for the Abbé himself. It is probable that Prévost himself partly sympathized with this attitude but would have hesitated to accept it in so extreme a form.

1. Cf. *supra*, p. 36.

2. Cf. *supra*, p. 39.

3. *Lettre à l'Académie*, Chap. VIII, p. 120.

4. PC., III, 184.

5. *Ibid.*, IX, 67.

6. *Ibid.*, V, 90.

much farther from being a Modern than has been thought, but the very fact that he consciously embraced the doctrine that the French have something to learn from English as well as from classic taste shows that the liberalizing spirit has had its effect. He was indeed actually preparing his countrymen to substitute imitation of the English for imitation of the Ancients. It was no small innovation. We need not be surprised that he did not burn his bridges behind him.

Liberalism in regard to the rules was not by any means entirely an affair of the eighteenth century. Prévost's own classic Racine had taken issue with the rules in these terms: "Je les conjure d'avoir assez bonne opinion d'eux-mêmes pour ne pas croire qu'une pièce qui les touche, et qui leur donne du plaisir, puisse être absolument contre les règles. La principale règle est de plaire et de toucher. Toutes les autres ne sont faites que pour parvenir à cette première <sup>1</sup>." So, as was to be expected, Molière: "Car enfin, si les pièces qui sont selon les règles ne plaisent pas et que celles qui plaisent ne soient pas selon les règles, il faudroit de nécessité que les règles eussent été mal faites <sup>2</sup>." La Bruyère, whom Prévost was fond of reading, exclaims: "Quelle prodigieuse distance entre un bel ouvrage et un ouvrage parfait et régulier! Je ne sais s'il s'en est encore trouvé de ce dernier genre. Il est peut-être moins difficile aux rares génies de rencontrer le grand et le sublime, que d'éviter toute sorte de fautes <sup>3</sup>." La Bruyère has this other passage worthy of Rousseau <sup>4</sup>: "Quand une lecture vous élève l'esprit, et qu'elle vous inspire des sentiments nobles et courageux, ne cherchez pas une autre règle pour juger de l'ouvrage; il est bon, et fait de main d'ouvrier <sup>5</sup>." Thus in the seventeenth century by the avowed partizans of the Ancients; in the eighteenth of course there are real attacks and

1. Racine, *Préface de Bérénice*, *Œuvres*, II, p. 378.

2. Molière, *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, sc. 6; Vol. III, pp. 358-59.

3. La Bruyère, *des Ouvrages de l'esprit*, par. 30.

4. Rousseau, *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Part 2, Letter XVIII, the Pope-Crouzas controversy.

5. La Bruyère, *op. cit.*, par. 31.

they are more definite and violent. It is no longer only the spirit of genius occasionally calling the rules in question when criticism tends to hamper too much the practice of his art, it is an attack on the whole principle of literary law-giving in general. La Motte in 1730 lances this reply to Voltaire's championship of the rules: " Vous vous récriez d'abord qu'un peuple sensé ne saurait ne pas être ami des règles. Oui, monsieur, si les règles voulaient dire la raison; mais comme elles ne signifient là que des institutions arbitraires, on peut fort bien avoir le sens commun sans les exiger. Ma pensée ne va donc en cet endroit qu'à prouver que l'unité seule d'un grand intérêt pourrait plaire par elle-même, au lieu que les trois unités sèchement observées pourraient encore glacer les spectateurs <sup>1</sup>. " In the same year La Motte attacked the lack of action in the French theater and advised a *judicious* imitation of the English in this respect <sup>2</sup>. The reducing of the unities to that of action alone is exactly what Prévost himself does in his treatment of Steele <sup>3</sup>. It is one of the best parts of his criticism, but La Motte has preceded him. Still earlier Saint-Evremond had observed in regard to the rules: " Les Anglois sont persuadés que les libertés qu'on se donne pour mieux plaire doivent être préférées à des règles exactes, dont un auteur stérile et languissant se fait un art d'ennuyer. Il faut aimer la règle pour éviter la confusion; il faut aimer le bon sens qui modère l'ardeur d'une imagination allumée; mais il faut ôter à la règle toute contrainte qui gêne, et bannir une raison scrupuleuse, qui par un trop grand attachement à la justesse, ne laisse rien de libre et de naturel <sup>4</sup>. " Finally, it can hardly be doubted that Du Bos, whose influence on his century was so great, exerted much influence upon Prévost also. Du Bos preached constantly criticism of " sentiment " instead

1. La Motte, *Suite des Réflexions sur la tragédie*, où l'on répond à M. de Voltaire, p. 60.

2. La Motte, *Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie de Romulus*, p. 502.

3. *Supra*, pp. 93-97.

4. Saint-Evremond, *Œuvres mêlées*, II, p. 212.

of criticism by rule. He acknowledges the same criterion as La Fontaine, Racine, Molière, and La Bruyère when he says that the work of art must please and touch the emotions, and that only by its effect may it be judged. He goes farther than they, however, in his perception that criticism must be historical and relative. We have seen that Prévost is usually conscious that to judge a foreign literature one must be thoroughly familiar with the customs, institutions, and character of the people among whom it has been produced. Only rarely does he seem to depart from this principle of relativity.

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the formation of Prévost's general attitude of conservative liberalism may in the main be traced to authors of his own country, such of it, that is, as is not due to his eventful life which brought him early into touch with different social, political, and literary *milieux*. When he went to England, he was already thirty-one years old; his general point of view must have been almost entirely formed before he came into contact with English literature. We cannot share the viewpoint of Mr. Bury, who in an enthusiastic essay attributes much of Prévost's formation to De Foe and to the English writers of the age of Elizabeth and of James. "To what sources," exclaims Mr. Bury, "had Prévost gone for inspiration and tragic power; if not to the English sixteenth century? And he only handed down to our modern literature what he had received from the country of Webster, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Heywood; for in England self-analysis dates far back<sup>1</sup>. " Of those mentioned, however, the only one whom Prévost gives indication of knowing even by name is Ben Jonson and him, as we have seen, he judges entirely after Rowe without adding a single personal comment. Prévost had used the autobiographical manner in the novel before going to England and, even though he may have read De Foe as soon as it was translated into French, he did not need to seek the method there; it was not new to the country

1. F. B. Bury, *The Abbé Prévost in England*, p. 33.



of Courtilz de Sandras and Lesage. As for the "science du milieu <sup>1</sup>," it is difficult to find it in Prévost's novels, except in the most vague and undeveloped form. Often his scenes are laid in countries of which he knew little or nothing.

It seems that he really came little in contact with English literature anterior to Dryden. Shakespear he knew somewhat; he probably had read and seen acted many of his plays, but we have seen that he brought back to his countrymen a minimum of personal impressions regarding the great playwright. Dryden came closer to him, and Milton, but they both yield before Steele, Addison, and Pope, who were really of one mind with him on most points of literary doctrine. Their influence, however, was directed mainly along the same lines as that of the liberal movement we have already seen appearing about the same time in France; it strengthened, but did not create, the tendencies of Prévost's criticism.

We have already noted more direct sources for his literary judgments: the Essays of Rowe and Gildon are all-important and most significant in doing away with nearly the whole of his supposed originality as far as Shakespear is concerned; Addison he cites frequently, as did Du Bos before him and Le Blanc after; Pope naturally is invoked as an authority and Shaftesbury likewise; Toland's *Life of Milton* is utilized <sup>2</sup>, as is Wotton's *Essay on Ancient and Modern Learning* <sup>3</sup>. A

1. Bury, *o. c.*, p. 38 and p. 49. Mr. Bury (p. 36) waves the *Pour et Contre* aside with the remark that Prévost "never forgot he was catering for a nation who always had detested earnest praise of another country; he wrote, therefore, more *en dilettante* in this journal than in any of his works, and M. Brunetière could scarcely say that in his periodical Prévost gave himself *tout entier* . . . The *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* contain a page on the English stage that reveals what the author thought, and did not always say, to the Parisian readers of his journal." There is a grain of truth in this attitude, but, it seems to me, only a grain. In any case it needs to be proved. There is no reason to suppose that the *Mémoires* represent Prévost's final opinion any more than the *Pour et Contre*, whereas what evidence we have of the author's preferences tends, as we have seen, to show that concessions in the periodical to public taste are not frequent nor important and that the journal represents substantially Prévost's real attitude toward English literature.

2. The same source had been used by the 1720 edition of Bayle.

3. Cf. *supra*, pp. 118-19.

study of the daily papers and periodicals published in London during the period from 1728 to 1740 might perhaps reveal other borrowings like those from Rowe and Gildon<sup>1</sup>; it is improbable, however, that these would materially change our estimate of Prévost's criticism, the case of the other authors involved being very different from that of Shakespear, who alone of those treated by Prévost presented especial difficulties to one of French training and tastes<sup>2</sup>. It is most unfortunate that important letters and documents concerning the Abbé Prévost, still preserved at Hesdin in 1844, were burned in a moment of pique by one of Prévost's own descendants, Alphonse-Xavier Le Merchier<sup>3</sup>. Editing the *Pour et Contre* nearly seven years in France, Prévost must have kept up constant and voluminous correspondence with friends in England. None of that correspondence has come to light.

So much for the question of sources; that of the influence of Prévost upon his period is more difficult to solve, for the Abbé was not one of those vigorous champions of new causes who leave a markedly individual impress on their time, so that even later ages may pick up the traces. His influence tends either to be obscured by that of Voltaire or to become merged with that of those contemporaries who also were aiding the spread of English ideas. The Abbé Le Blanc referred to Prévost's translation of *All for Love*<sup>4</sup> and criticized a detail regarding Hamlet<sup>5</sup>. Voltaire, as is shown by his correspondence and his evident desire to be well spoken of in the *Pour et Contre*, considered it a magazine of influence. He even gave circulation to some of his articles by having them printed in Prévost's journal. Both Rousseau<sup>6</sup> and Diderot<sup>7</sup>

1. Cf. *supra*, Chap. vii, pp. 67 ff. The files of these newspapers have not been accessible to me.

2. Swift pleased Prévost's contemporaries more than he did the Abbé himself.

3. Harrise, pp. 76-77.

4. *Supra*, p. 73, note 3.

5. *Lettres d'un François*, II, pp. 294-95.

6. *Œuvres*, V, pp. 469, 578.

7. *Œuvres*, VII, p. 343.

praised Prévost's novels very highly; it is quite probable, especially in the case of Diderot, that they were also readers of the *Pour et Contre*. We know that Rousseau later referred to Lillo's play, the London Merchant, in terms of the highest praise, and that it was Prévost who introduced this piece to the French public. Diderot in turn was strongly influenced by this same play in the direction of his *bourgeois* drama. Whether their first acquaintance with Lillo came from Prévost or from Clément of Geneva, who in 1748 translated the whole play, is not certain. The latter in any case was familiar with Prévost's previous treatment<sup>1</sup>.

But Prévost's influence must be sought less in particular individuals than in the public at large for whom he wrote. The *Pour et Contre* was read, not only in France, but wherever in Europe the French language and literature were familiar to a cultivated society. M. Lirondelle<sup>2</sup> has noted that it was read in Russia. It is needless to insist upon the rôle of French in the eighteenth century as the one universal language read and spoken from Italy to Sweden. It is not without moment that the great names of English literature and much of their work were thus early treated by the *Pour et Contre* with fairness and moderation. In the case of Shakespear it is especially important that Prévost was not the rabid anglomaniac that he has been thought to be; had he been so, it might well be that the cause of English literature would have been greatly hindered instead of helped, that Europe impregnated with the principles of French taste might have rejected for a longer time still the great master of English drama. As it was, the Abbé Prévost presented the English poet, with insufficient personal enthusiasm it is true, but with fairness and due attention to the more reasonable of the two English attitudes, warning his readers frankly that they would find much that would displease and shock their

1. Jusserand, p. 193, n. 1.

2. *Shakespeare en Russie*, p. 16.

taste, but telling them at the same time that they would find much to repay their reading in this strange new drama that had come out of the north. It cannot be doubted that thus Prévost rendered a very real service both to English and to French literature, a service for which he deserves high credit, even though its extent cannot be precisely measured.

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